Free Mini Book Inside! ★ **2 Holiday Posters You'll Love**

November/December 2007

americangirl.com

American Girl®

7 fun ways to spend time with friends

* **Bake holiday cookies**
* **Take a silly family quiz!**

Plus!
Little ways YOU can make a difference

American Girl®

Volume 15, Number 6

2 **Letters from You**
3 **Girls Express**
8 **Contest**
Fake Frosties
10 **Heart to Heart**
Merry Birthday!
12 **A Little Means a Lot**
14 **Craft**
Memory Books
18 **Book Buds**
20 **Quiz**
Holiday Fun for the Family
22 **Cooking**
Star Light, Star Bright!
24 **Friendship Matters**
Gifts with Heart
26 **Dancing Like the Stars**
30 **Snow Angel**
38 **Brain Waves**
43 **Mini Mag**
45 **Posters**
47 **Help!**
49 **Behind the Scenes**
Plus: Life's Little Gifts



Gifts with Heart
Spending time with friends is the best gift of all.

24

Dancing Like the Stars
Meet girls (and boys!) who know how to step, spin, and show their style.

26



See AG Online!
Visit americangirl.com to peek behind the scenes of AG magazine!
Always get a parent's permission before surfing the Web or giving out your full name, address, or any other personal info.

Contents

Follow Your Inner Star™



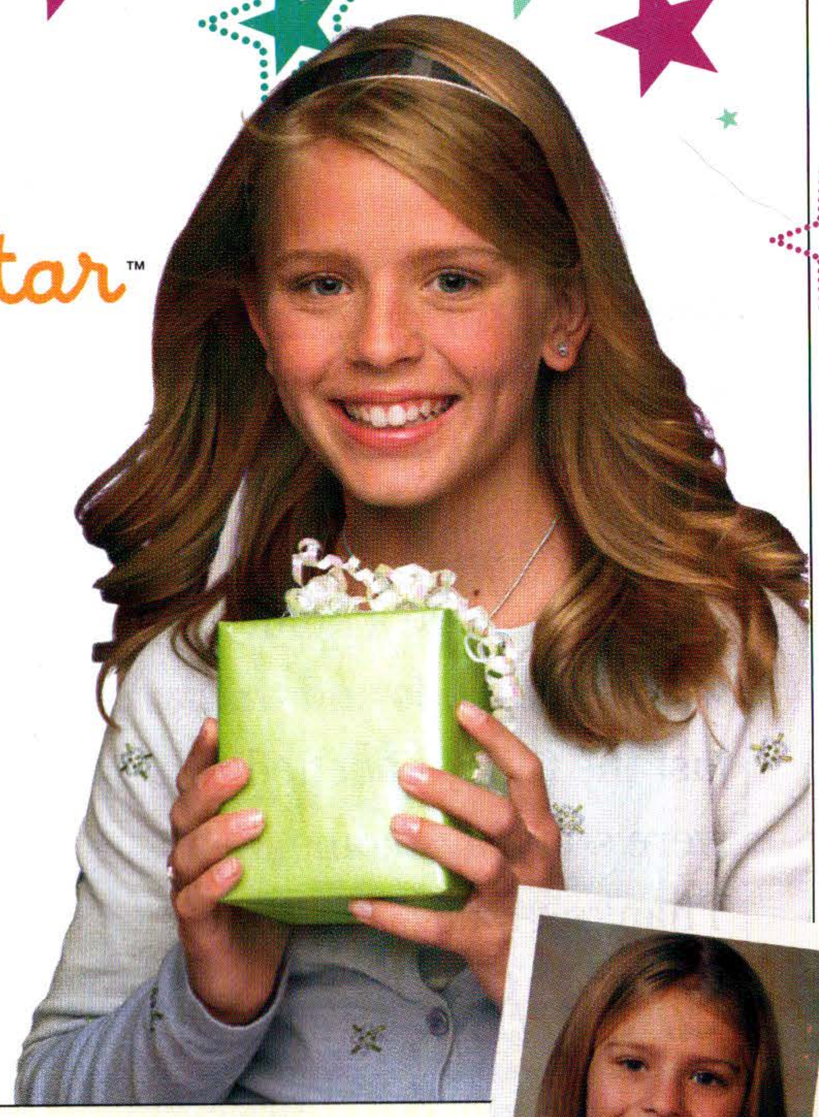
Memory Books
Turn paper bags into a great holiday gift!

14

A Little Means a Lot
You don't need much money to make a BIG difference in the world!

12







About the Cover

Meet Angela J., age 11. We asked her some silly questions from this issue's quiz.

Would you rather...

✻ keep a pet reindeer or a snowman in your room?

I'd rather keep a snowman.

✻ wear a Santa hat or elf shoes all day?

I'd rather wear a Santa hat.

✻ eat a gingerbread house or live in one?

I'd rather live in one. That would be very fun!

Angela J.

To take the whole quiz yourself—or with your family—turn to page 20.

Cover photo: Steven Talley

Letters from You

Perfect Party



I thought "Camp AG" in the July/August 2007 jumbo issue was so creative! I had been waiting to have a fabulous party with my friends and that was just the thing I needed. There were some awesome ideas. Thanks, *American Girl*.

Grace B.
Age 12, Minnesota

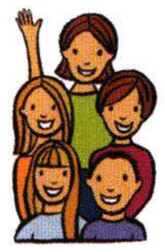
Totally Twins



I really liked the story *The End of the Og Twins*. I'm a big-time worrier, just like Hannah. Also, my sister and I pretend we are twins. When we wear the same outfit, people think that we really *are* twins!

Katarina C.
Age 9, Nevada

So Many Siblings



I loved reading the article about triplets, quadruplets, and quintuplets in the July/August issue. I was especially amazed when I read about the quintuplets. I never thought that you could have four siblings that share the same birthday with you!

Michelle T. :-)
Age 10, California

Write to Us!



Want to drop us a line? Write us at:

***American Girl* magazine**
8400 Fairway Place
Middleton, WI 53562

You can also send letters via e-mail to readermail@americangirl.com. Either way, be sure to include your first and last name and your birth date. We can't print every letter we receive, but we read and learn from each one.

Win It!

On page 19, you'll read about our latest Win It! contest. To enter, send a postcard by December 15 with your first and last name and address to:

Win It!—N/D 07
***American Girl* magazine**
8400 Fairway Place
Middleton, WI 53562



Official Rules

1. Employees of American Girl and its affiliates and their families are not eligible.
2. Only one entry per family.
3. To be valid, all entries must be received by mail by December 15, 2007. Entries may not be faxed or e-mailed. A parent or guardian must sign the entry.
4. One winner will be chosen at random.
5. All entries become the property of American Girl and will not be returned.
6. Void where prohibited by law.

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Winner of a 2006 Parents' Choice Silver Award

EdPress

The National Magazine Awards Finalist

American Girl®

Girls EXPRESS

Tiny Treasures

Use matchboxes as gift boxes for your smallest gifts.



Cut a strip of colorful paper the width of an empty matchbox, and trim it to fit around the cover. Attach the paper to the cover with Glue Dots or double-sided tape.

Make a tiny tag out of colored paper, and attach with ribbon.

Use these tiny boxes to hold little gifts such as earrings, barrettes, school photos, stickers, key chains, necklaces, and charms.

Decorate box with stickers or ribbon.

Did You Know?

You'll flip for these fun facts!

It's a Wing Thing

Bismarck, North Dakota, holds the world record for the most snow angels made in one place at one time. Earlier this year, almost 9,000 people—including a woman who was celebrating her 99th birthday—plopped down in the snow outside the state capitol building to flap their arms and legs for the record.

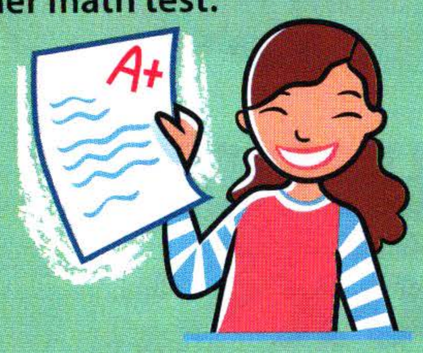
Buzzword

euphoric

How to say it: you-FOR-ick

What it means: filled with happiness, confidence, or a feeling of well-being

One way to use it: Kylie was euphoric when she learned that she'd earned an A+ on her math test.



The buzzword is tucked into this issue of *American Girl*. Can you find it? The answer is on page 42.

Find It!

Look for fun facts sprinkled throughout the magazine!

Photo: Chris Hynes Illustrations: Tracey Wood

Have a Happy Holiday

Get in the spirit by decorating your own space for the season.



Surprise!
Cover your door in wrapping paper, and tie the throw pillows on your bed with ribbons so that they look like gifts.

Let It Snow
Cut out tons of paper snowflakes and stick them to your window with removable adhesive putty.

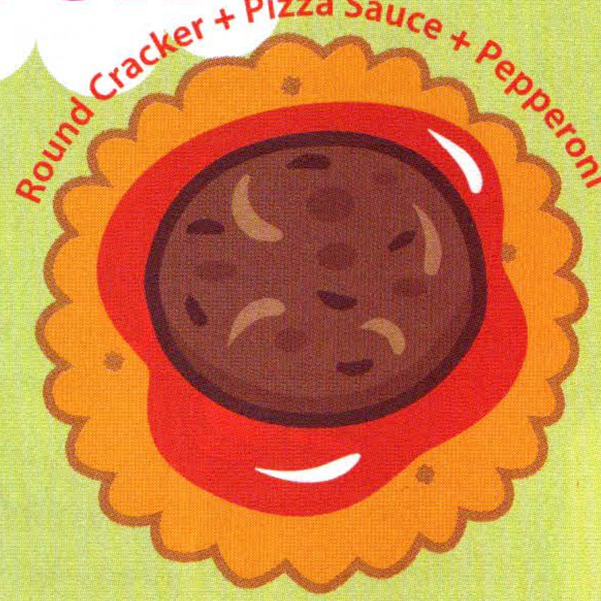
Dress It Up
Tie back your curtains with tinsel garlands.

Holiday Sparkle
Ask a parent to help you put twinkle lights into a clear vase. Then dim your lights and enjoy the glow.

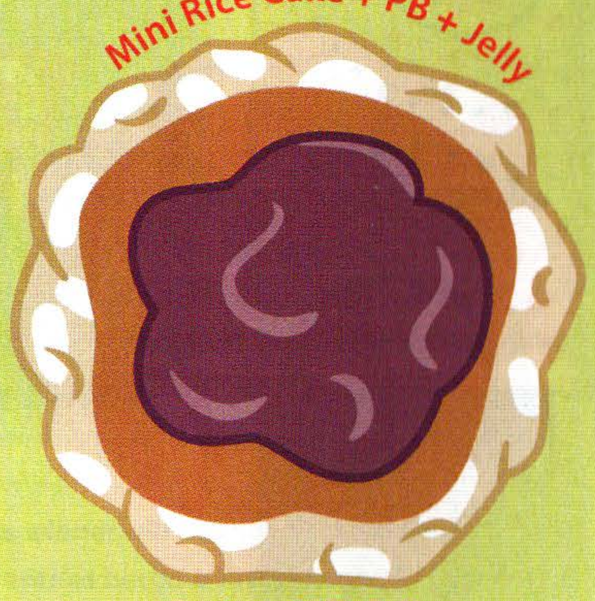
Stay Warm
Make tiny fleece scarves for your dolls or stuffed animals.

Lunch Box

Have a mini holiday party during lunch at school. Make these yummy bites with your friends for everyone to share.



Teeny Pizza



Baby PB&J



One-Bite Nacho

True Story

It was supposed to be a fun night, but then—awful news.

Dear American Girl,

Last winter, we were at a professional basketball game to sing the national anthem with some kids from our church. Before we went out to sing, our mom got a call from one of our neighbors, who told her that our house was on fire.

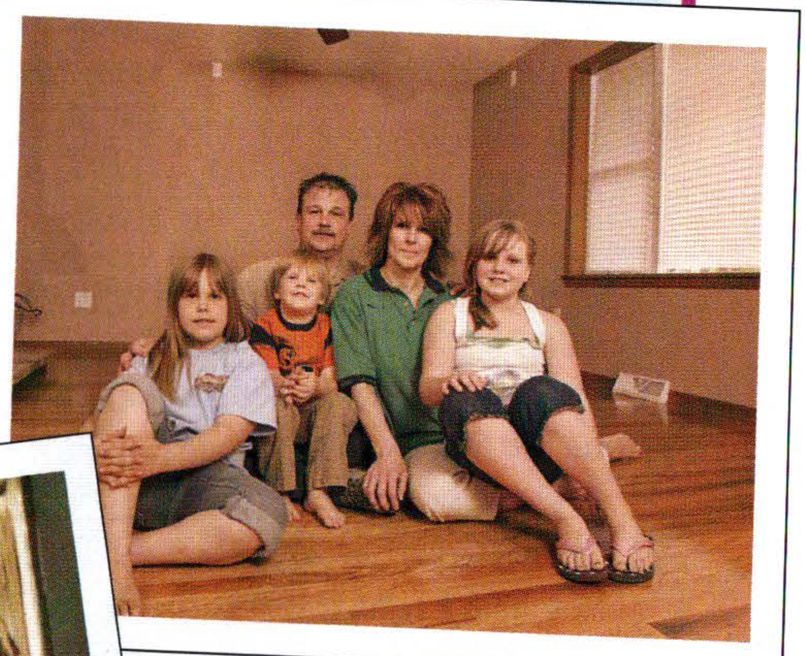
Most of the house had been ruined by fire, smoke, or water from the firefighters' hoses. We lost almost everything we owned. After the fire, though, people were so nice. They gave us food and clothing and furniture. Some people didn't even know us, but they were helping to make sure that we had what we needed. We're so thankful for them.

We lived in a hotel for a few days and then a rental house for a few months while our house was being rebuilt, and we got to move back there a few months ago. It looks completely different now, but it still feels like home. And after losing all of our possessions, we learned that we don't really need to own a lot of stuff in order to be happy—we just need each other.

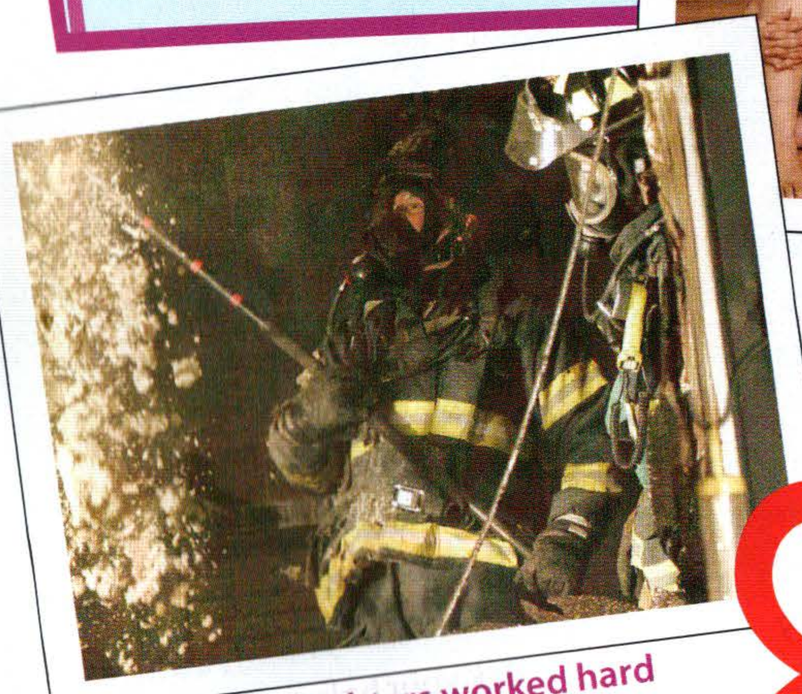
Sincerely,

Rylee S. Randi S.

Ages 9 and 12, Wisconsin



We're back in our house now!



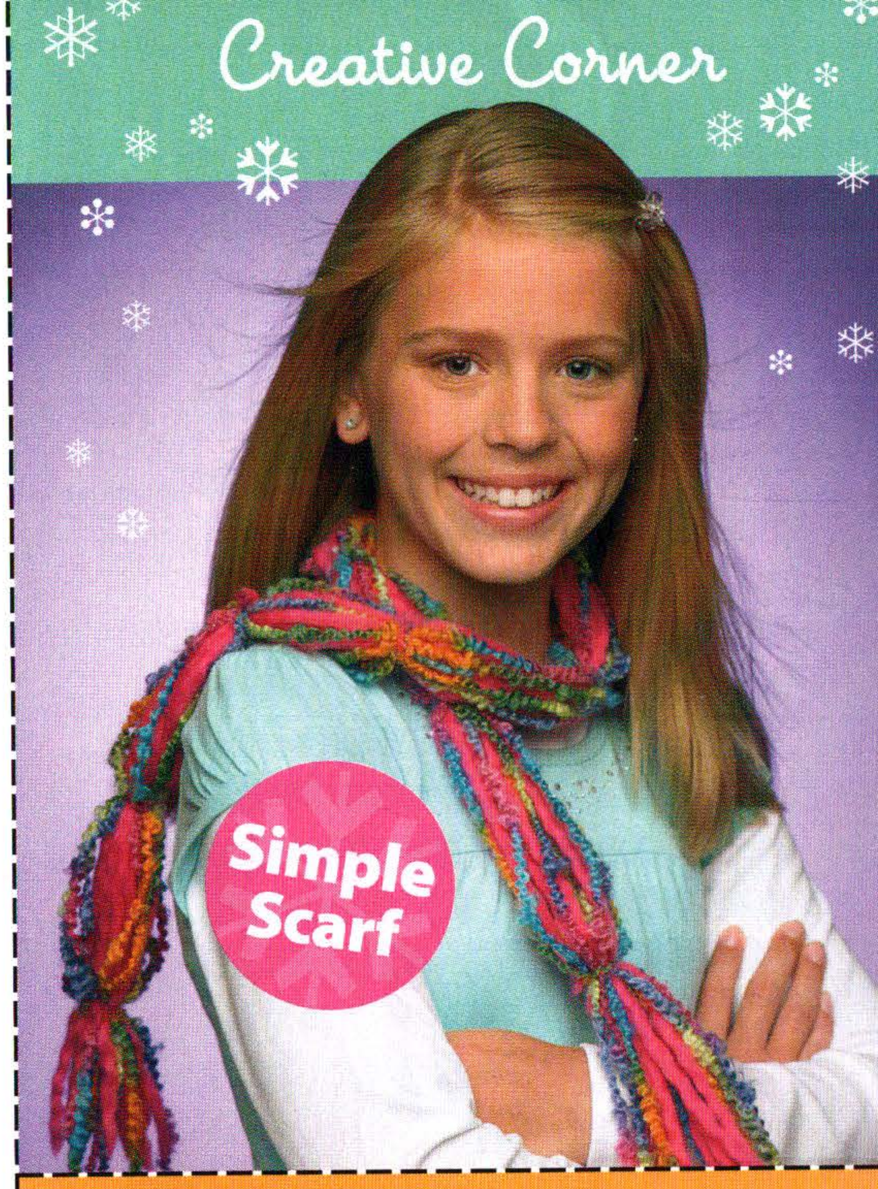
Firefighters worked hard to put out the flames.

Every girl has her own **True Story.** Write us a letter about something that has happened in your life and send it to the address on page 2.

Family photo: Dan Lassiter Fire photo: Bill Olmsted

Cut out your answer and mail it to the address on page 2.

Creative Corner



AG Poll

In our May/June issue, we asked if you'd rather have your gifts be a surprise or make a list of gifts you'd like. Here's what you said:

I wish for... 204

Surprise me... 208

Next question:

If you could work with animals, what would be your dream job? Circle your choice.

Professional jockey

Underwater photographer

Zoo veterinarian

Jungle-wildlife researcher

Simple Scarf

Cut a piece of colored yarn long enough for both ends to touch your waist when the yarn is hung over your shoulders. Add similar lengths of yarn until your scarf is thick, and match up the ends. Cut seven lengths of yarn about 6 inches long. Double-knot the short pieces of yarn around different sections of the bundle to hold it together. If you want, trim the ends of the knotted pieces. Make scarves for yourself, or give them as gifts!

Photo: Steven Talley

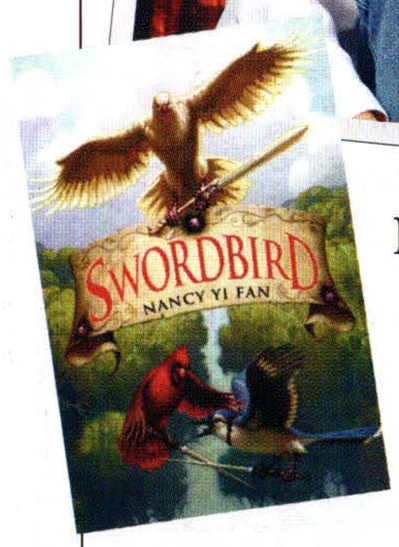
Help Wanted!

Show us your space! We want to know what your bedroom looks like. Whether you have a favorite little corner where you curl up to read or an awesome, honest-to-goodness dream bedroom, we'd love to see it. Send us a photo of your favorite part of your room, along with a letter explaining why you love it, to the address on page 2.

Soaring Success

The idea came in a dream. As Nancy F. slept, she imagined cardinals and blue jays struggling against an evil hawk. She also envisioned a huge white bird with a magical sword that could defeat the hawk and save the forest. When she awoke, the fifth-grader knew that she had a story to tell.





Nancy wrote her dream into a book, *Swordbird*, which was published earlier this year. The story is scary in some parts and funny in others, but above all, "*Swordbird* is a novel about peace and freedom and what happens when they are lost," says Nancy, now 14.

To get her book published, Nancy sent drafts to lots of different book companies. Despite her age, Nancy was confident in her story—and in herself. "If a person had told me that there was no way for a kid to write and publish a book, I would answer with, 'Nothing is impossible.'"

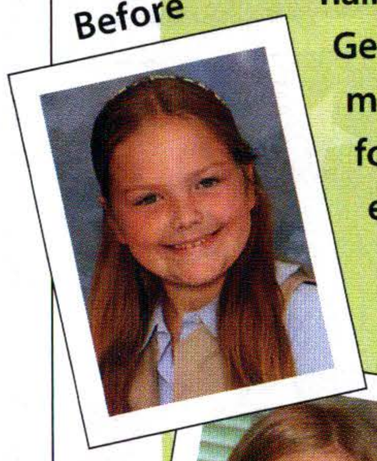
Shining Star

Haley T. wanted to give someone a gift. She'd learned about a program that collected human hair to make wigs. The wigs went to kids who had diseases that caused them to lose their own hair. It took the 11-year-old Georgia girl a year and four months to grow nearly a foot of hair, and she was excited to give it to someone who needed it.

Not that it was entirely easy. "I was really nervous," Haley remembers. "When it was the big day, I started thinking that maybe I didn't want to do this." But the hairstylist worked quickly. She separated Haley's hair into sections, and then *snip, snip!*—the hair was gone in an instant.

"I felt so great that I made a difference," Haley says, knowing that her hair went to a child who would appreciate it. "And I love my new hairdo now!"

Before





After

You can shine, too.

Ask your hairstylist about groups that use hair to make wigs for kids who need them. Your stylist also can give you advice about growing out your hair for donation.

Nancy F. photo: Zui'ai Photo Studio

AG Art Gallery

Animals—both real and fanciful—inspired these artists.





Talia C.
Age 12, Washington





Britney B.
Age 14, Utah





Marina C.
Age 11, California

We need winter-themed **artwork** for next year's gallery. Send color **copies** of your original artworks to the address on page 2. Sorry, we can't return entries.

You Pick It!

You loved being able to choose a topic for the July/August issue of the magazine. So we're letting you pick it—again!

1. Go to americangirl.com and click on "Fun for Girls." There, you'll find this list of topics, and you can vote for the one that you would most like to see in the magazine. Here are your choices:



2. After November 19, check back at the "Fun for Girls" part of americangirl.com to see which topic got the most votes. Use the topic to create drawings, poems, recipes, games, jokes, stories, crafts, photos, fashion—whatever you can dream up!

3. Follow the directions online to submit your work. Entries are due by December 14. We'll use the winning "You Pick It!" topic and some of our favorite entries in the July/August 2008 issue.

Contest

Fake Frosties

These AG readers made snowmen out of everything from ice cream to pumpkins to yarn—everything *but* snow!

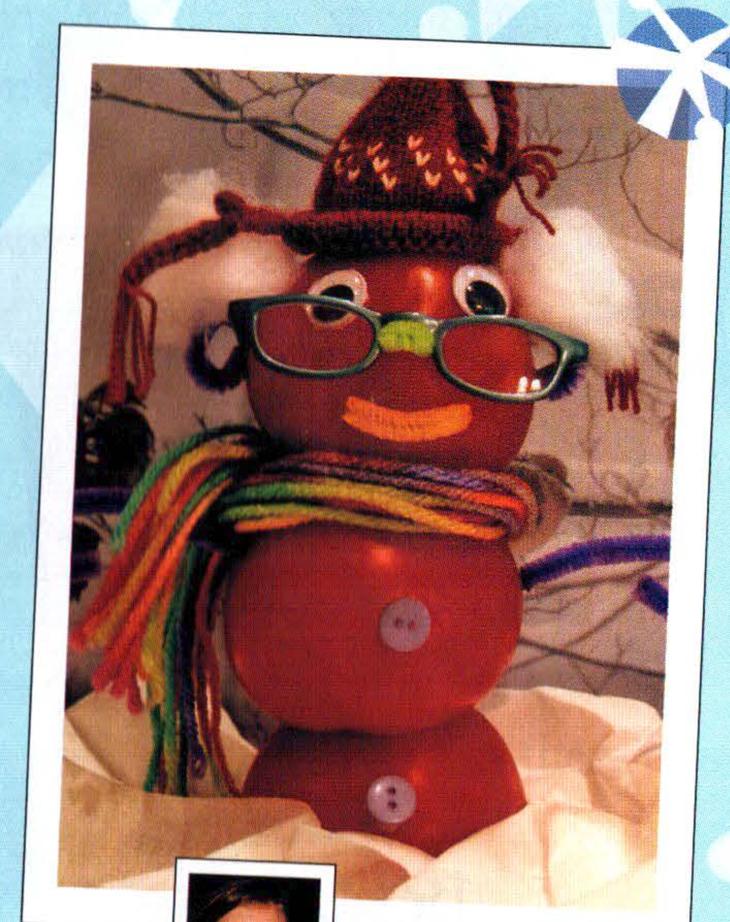


Amber N.
Age 14, Indonesia





Jackie J.
Age 10, South Carolina





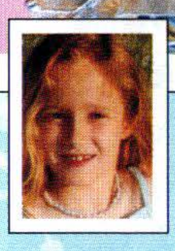
Christine S.
Age 11, Missouri





Eliot P.
Age 9, Indiana





Emma S.
Age 9, New York

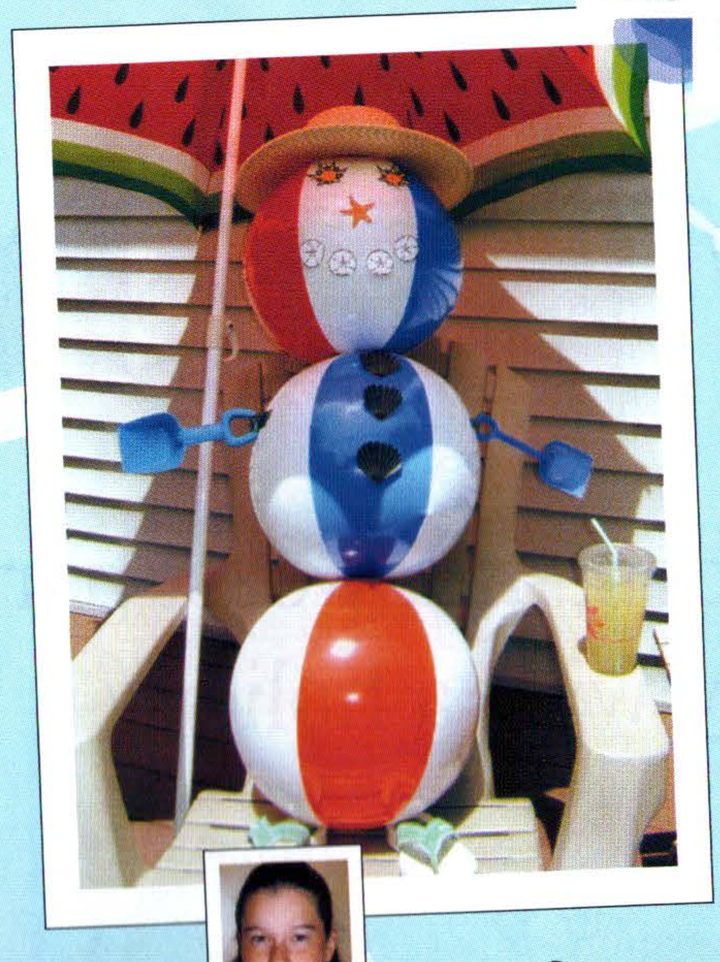




Erin W.
Age 8, Canada

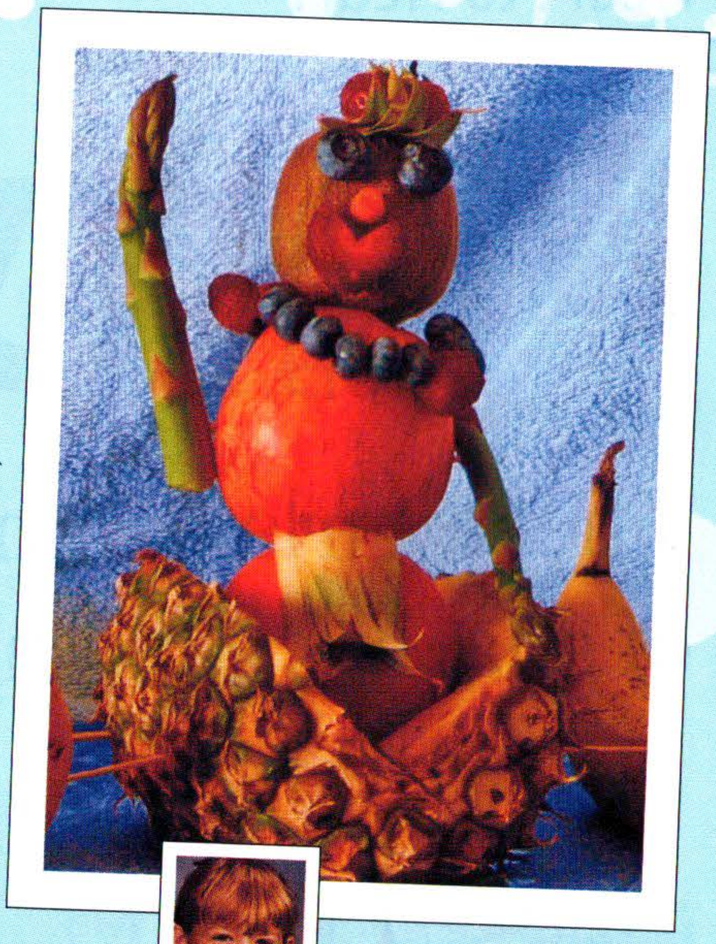


Cecilia C.
Age 11, Georgia



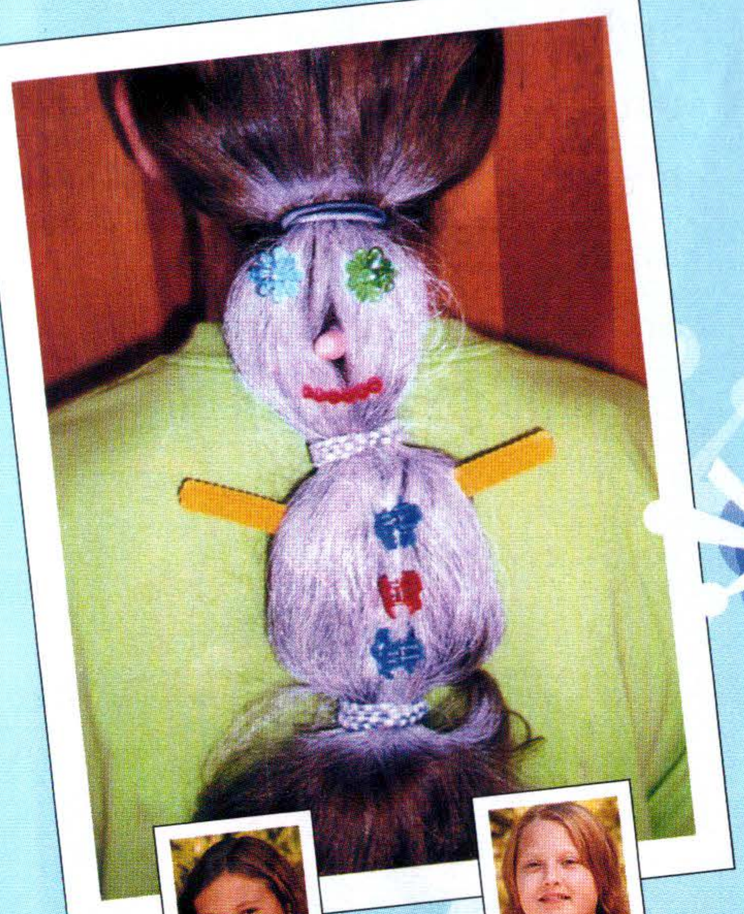


Jennifer G.
Age 13, Rhode Island





Kaylyn G.
Age 13, California



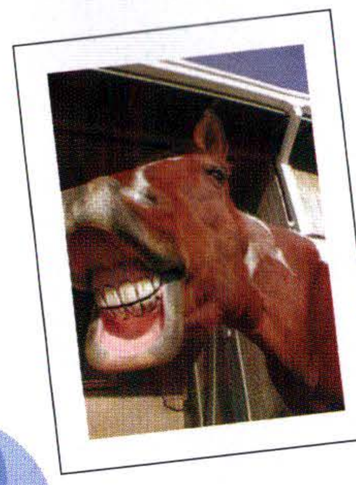


Hannah H. Paige G.
Both age 12, Massachusetts

Katie B.
Age 11, Wisconsin



Kasia K.
Age 8, Illinois



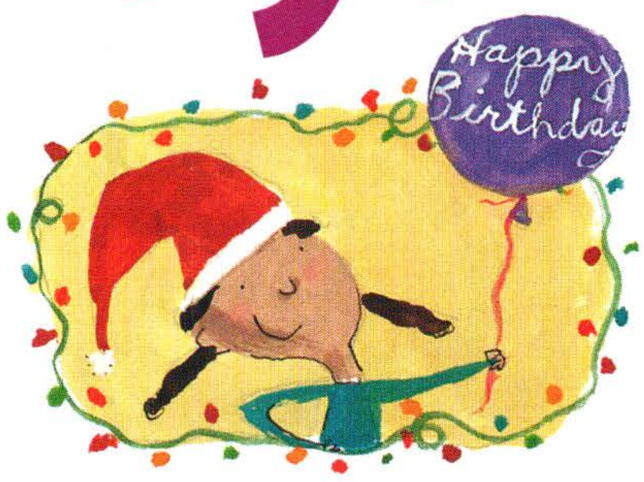
New Contest: Pet Smiles

Do you have a sweet picture of your pet flashing a smile? Does your pet like to grin from ear to ear? We want to see smiling cats, fish, hamsters, dogs, horses, and any other pets you have. Send your photos to the address on page 2, along with your first and last name, address, and birth date. Deadline: December 10, 2007. Winners will appear in the May/June 2008 issue. Sorry, but we can't return entries.

Illustrations: Lauren Scheuer

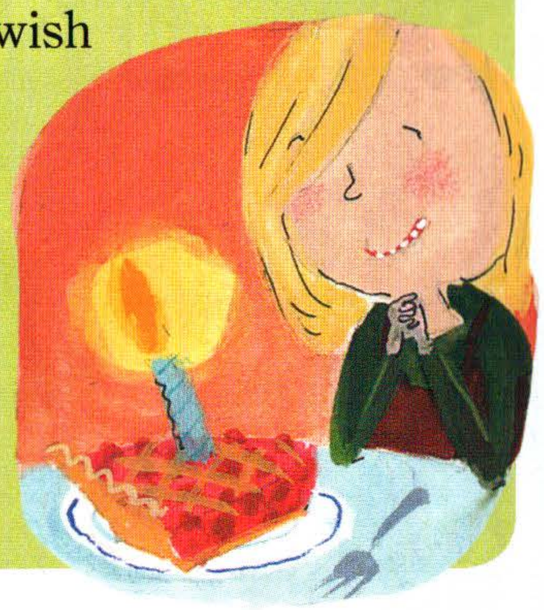
Merry Birthday!

These girls tell the best and worst parts of sharing a birthday with a holiday.

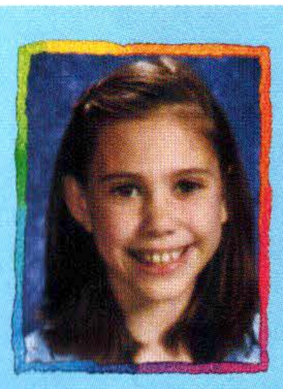




My birthday is sometimes on Thanksgiving. It's great to spend it with my family, but everyone is usually too busy cooking to wish me a happy birthday. My mom makes me feel special by letting me choose the kinds of pies we will serve for dessert. I always get the first piece!



Gwen S.
Age 9, California



I can never have a party on the day I was actually born because my birthday is the day after Christmas and all of my friends are usually on vacation. But every year, I wake up on my birthday to find streamers on the Christmas tree—we call it the birthday tree!

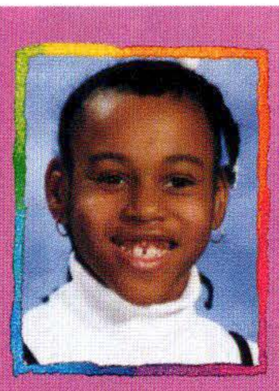
Colleen F.
Age 10, Oregon





My birthday is always between holidays, so it's hard to have a big party with lots of friends. I make my birthday special by having themed slumber parties with my three closest friends—*they* are the reason that it's special!

Hannah V.
Age 10, California



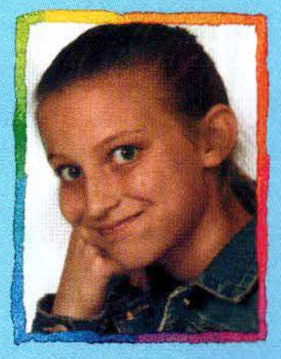
The best part about having my birthday around the holidays is that it's the most magical time of the year. We celebrate Kwanzaa the day after Christmas, and my family sings songs and enjoys a homemade feast. I always get extra attention!

Beverly J.
Age 9, Pennsylvania



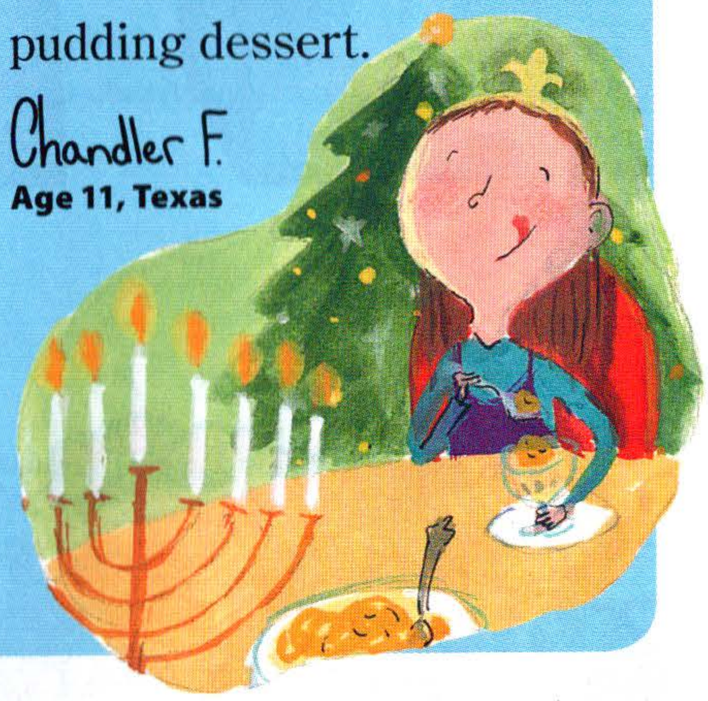
I usually don't know what I would like for a gift because my birthday is right after Christmas. Sometimes I celebrate on my half-birthday in July. That way, I can have fun in the sun!

Katharine A.
Age 12, Georgia



My birthday is December 25th. My family and I celebrate both Hanukkah and Christmas, so sometimes we celebrate three things on my birthday! I love it because everyone is cheerful and I like giving and receiving presents. The best part is my grandma's pudding dessert.

Chandler F.
Age 11, Texas



Big Truth

Celebrate! It's still your special day.



Every year for my December birthday, my mom and I see *The Nutcracker* and then look at holiday-themed store windows. It's a busy time of year, but these special birthday memories will last a lifetime!

Alexis H.
Age 10, New York



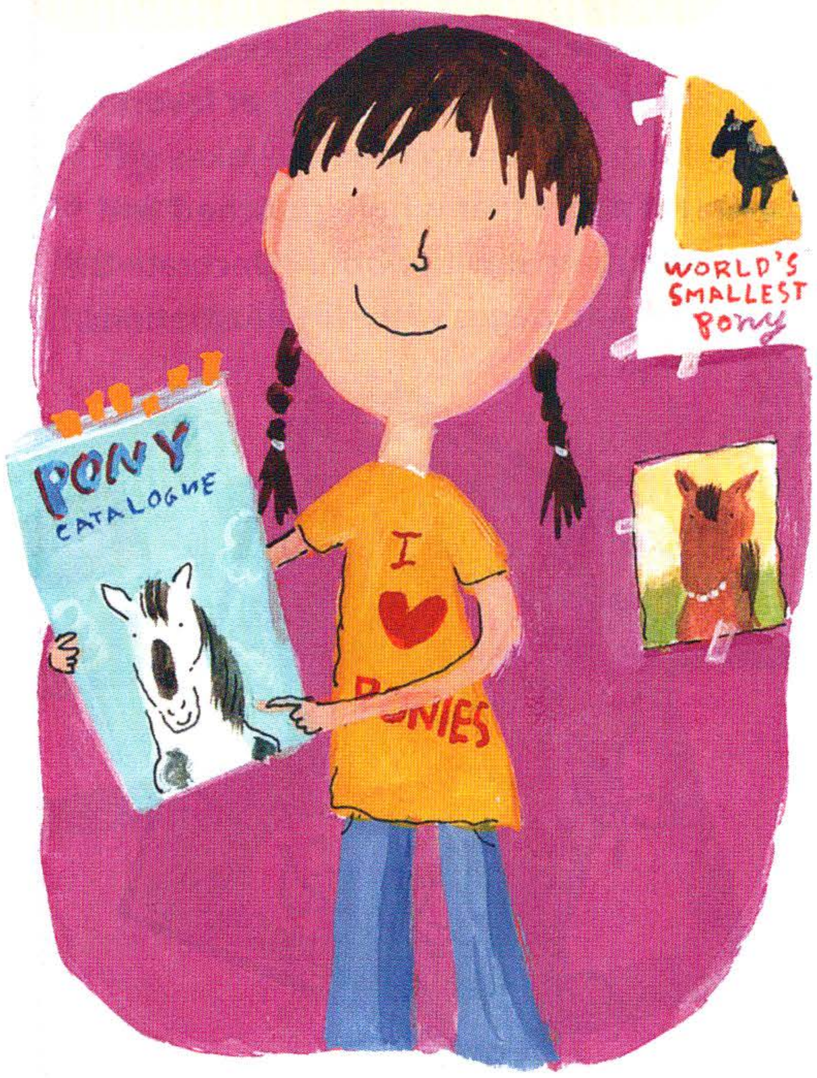
My birthday is on New Year's Eve. The world celebrates with me! I have a small celebration with my family on my birthday and then a larger party with my friends later in January—I get to celebrate twice!

Megan H.
Age 10, California

Speak from Your Heart

Next subject: Pets. How does it feel when you can't own the pet that you'd love? What do you do when you really want a dog or a horse but can't get one? Do you play with your friend's cat? Take care of a virtual pet? Tell us the clever ways you show love for an animal that you can't have at home.

Send answers, name, birth date, and school photo to the address on page 2. Deadline: December 10, 2007. Some answers will appear in the May/June 2008 issue. ★

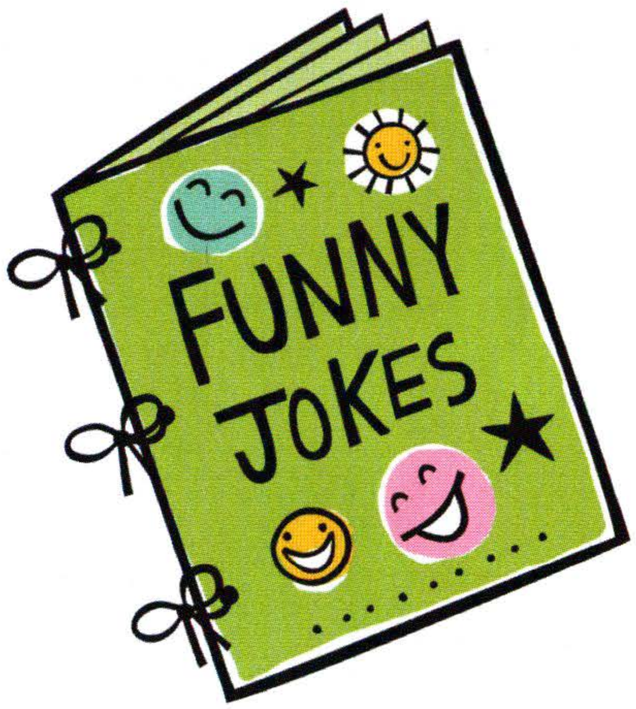


Illustrations: Laura Cornell



Lots of Laughs

Make a joke book for someone who could use an extra smile. Ask everyone you know to submit his or her favorite joke to you. Compile all the jokes on plain paper that is hole-punched and tied together with ribbon. Decorate the cover and pages with silly illustrations.





Coat Collection

Organize a coat drive for kids and adults who are in need of warm coats this winter. If a big group is coming over to your house for the holidays, ask all your guests to bring any coats they don't wear anymore. Be sure to thank your guests for their help!

Sing This Season

Get a group of friends and an adult together to sing holiday tunes to people you know in your neighborhood. Decorate an empty can or box with the name of a charity, and use it to collect tips that you will donate. Coordinate your outfits—for example, wear red scarves—and be sure to practice a few classic carols first.



For $5



Holiday Reading

With a parent's help, host a book hour for some of the kids in the neighborhood. Charge $5 for each child who is dropped off, and serve a treat like hot chocolate or warm cookies. Use the money you raise to buy holiday books for a charity.

Have a Ball

With a package of inexpensive ball ornaments and a little creativity, you can make some beautiful ornaments—to donate, of course!

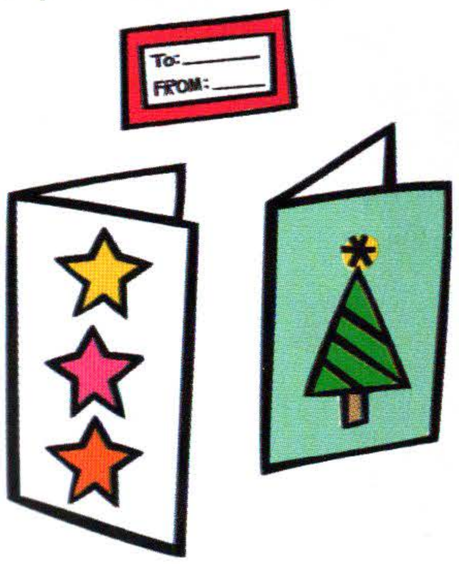
Use paint, glitter, or ribbon for decoration.

For $10



Craft Sale

Host a holiday craft open house for your friends and family. You can make crafts from patterned paper, stickers, ribbon, and pretty paint pens. Sell handmade gift tags, cards, and ornaments. Let your customers know that you are donating the profits.

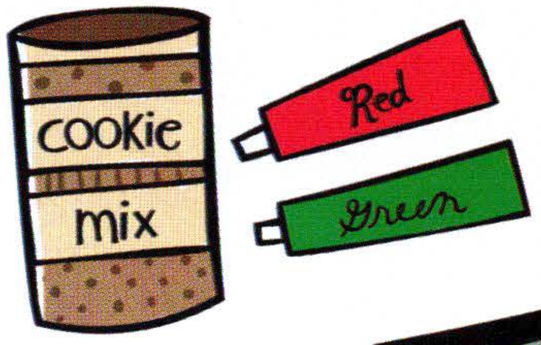


Winter Wear

Invite your crafty friends over for a winter wear party. Ask everyone to bring storebought hats, mittens, or scarves that you can decorate with fabric paint. Take a group photo with your cool creations before you donate them to a charity.

Cookie Kit

Baking yummy treats is one of the best parts of the holidays. Put together a holiday cookie-making kit to donate. Include a package of dry cookie-dough mix, tubes of icing, sprinkles, and a cookie cutter.



Use these ideas to support a local charity or organization that may be accepting donations over the holidays. Make sure to ask an adult to call ahead first:

- children's hospital
- library
- nature center
- food pantry
- animal shelter
- nursing home
- place of worship
- women's shelter
- school
- mall toy drive

How do you help a lot with a little? Send your best ideas—or photos of yourself doing these projects—to the address on page 2.

Illustrations: Maranda Maberry

Craft

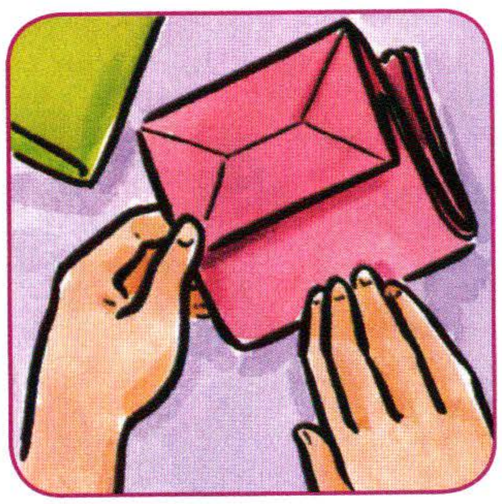
Memory Books

Turn paper bags into a scrapbook to hold great memories.

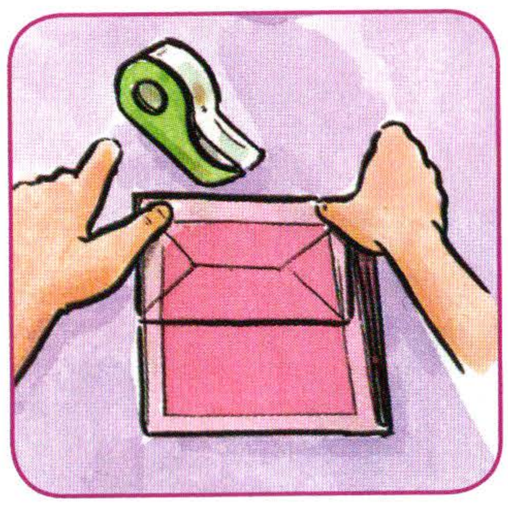


YOU WILL NEED

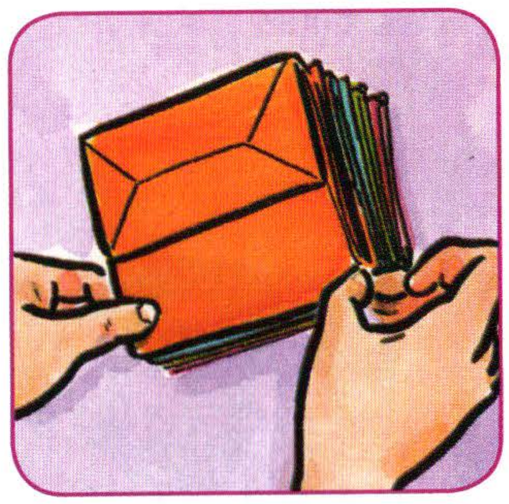
- 4 small decorative paper bags (available at craft and party stores)
- Double-stick tape
- Ribbon
- Tape
- Scissors
- Felt
- Tacky glue
- Appliqué
- Craft supplies such as wavy-edged scissors, paper punches, felt shapes, stickers, rhinestones, etc.



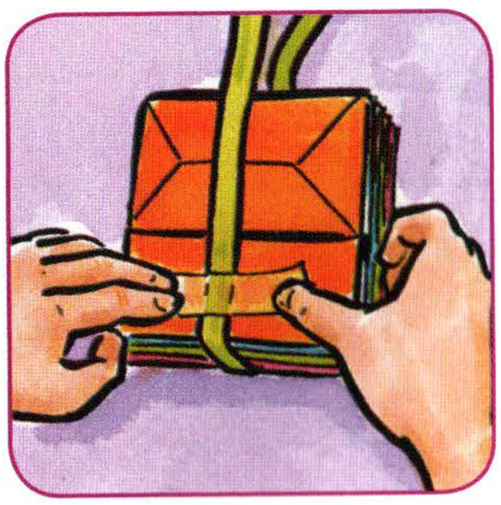
1 Fold 1 paper bag in half with bottom of bag facing up. Repeat with other bags.



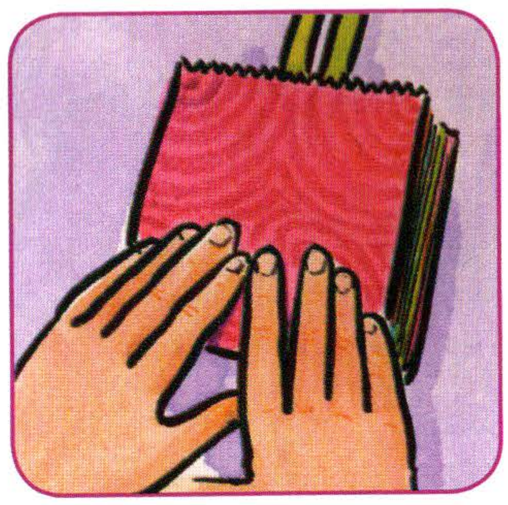
2 Place double-stick tape along all 4 edges on top side of one folded bag.



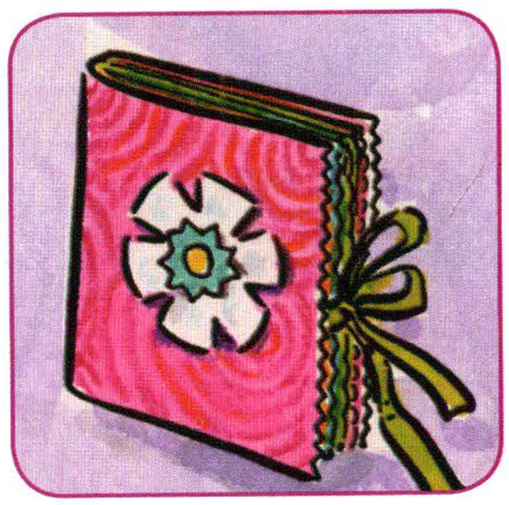
3 Place another bag on top of taped bag. Make sure that folded edges are on the same side and that all edges line up. Press to secure. Repeat with other bags.



4 Wrap ribbon around book and secure with tape. This will be the book closure. Make sure open ends of pages are not covered.



5 Cut felt to wrap around book to make cover. Glue felt to book. Let dry.



6 Glue appliqué to cover. Decorate pages with stickers, pictures, and more. Tuck surprises into open ends of pages. Tie ribbons to keep book closed.

Make one for yourself or give it as a gift!



Use wavy-edged scissors to create cool borders around pictures.

Friends are sweet!

Superstars

FUN

Friends are so much...

Smile!

Start a sentence on a page in the book and finish it with a fun tag to pull out!

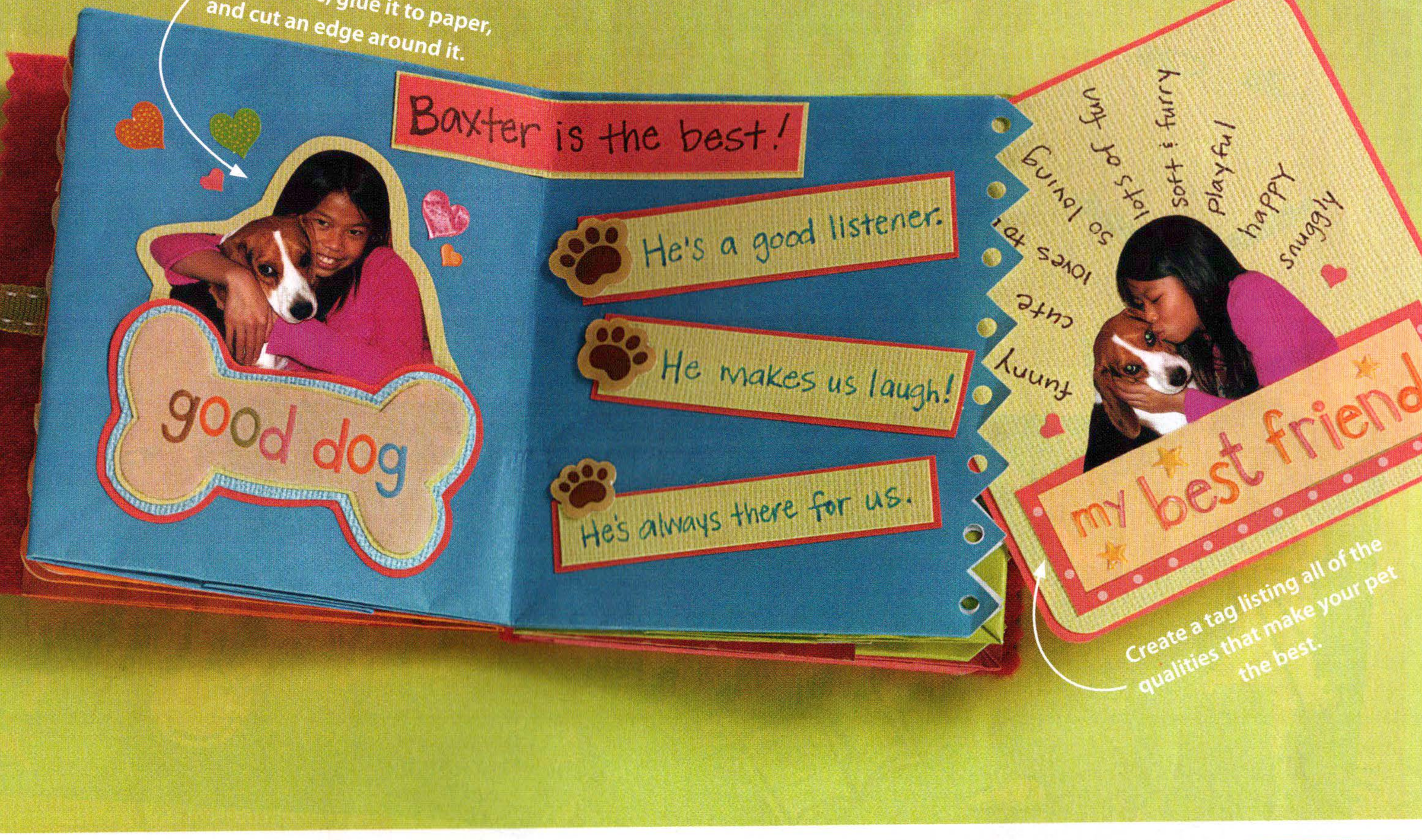
Trim around ordinary photos of friends and family to create a photo blast!

We're one big happy family!

Mom and Me

Frame a favorite photo with pizzazz.

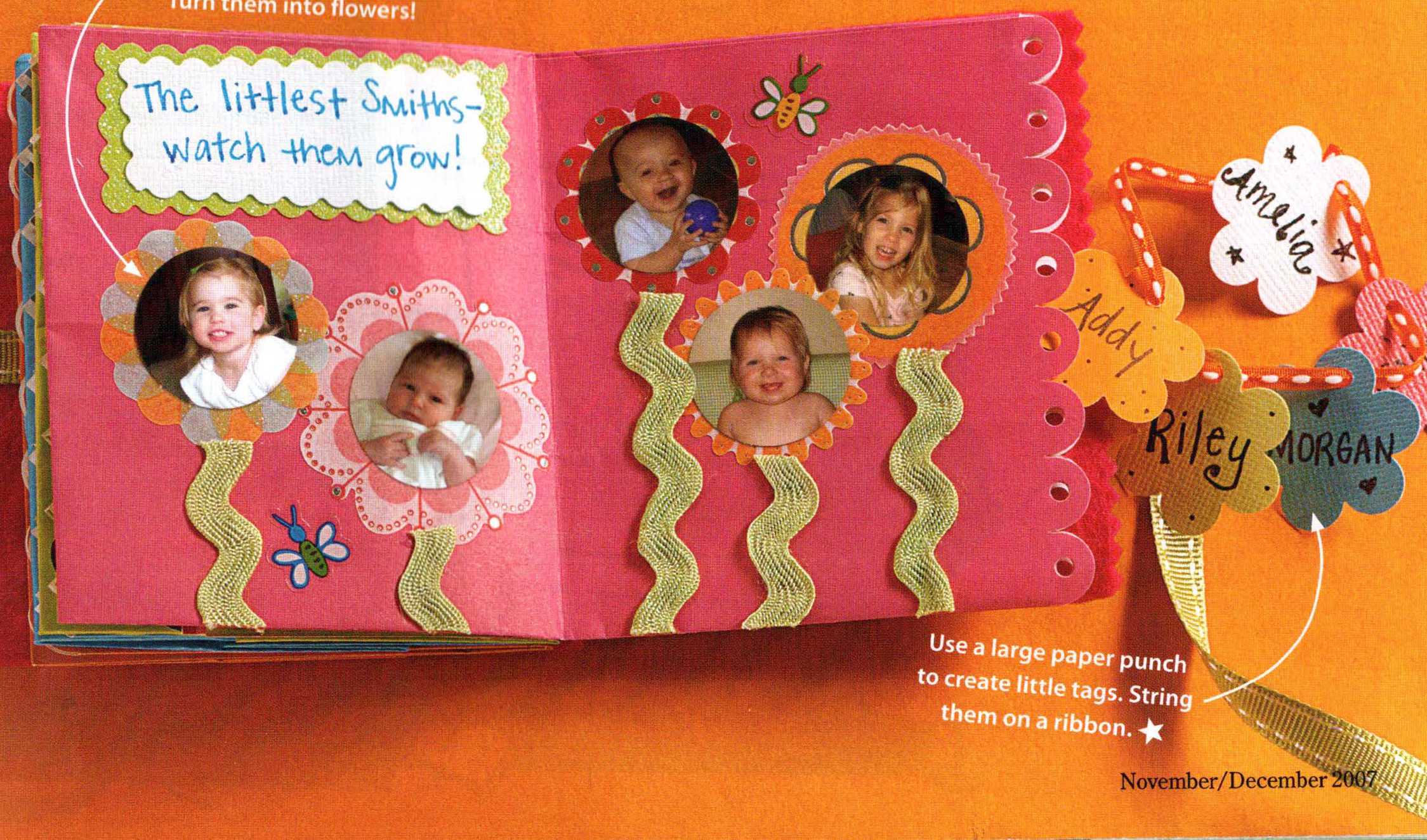
Trim a picture, glue it to paper, and cut an edge around it.



Create a tag listing all of the qualities that make your pet the best.

Photos: Salisbury Studios; illustrations: Shawn Banner

Use a large paper punch to cut pictures into perfect circles. Turn them into flowers!

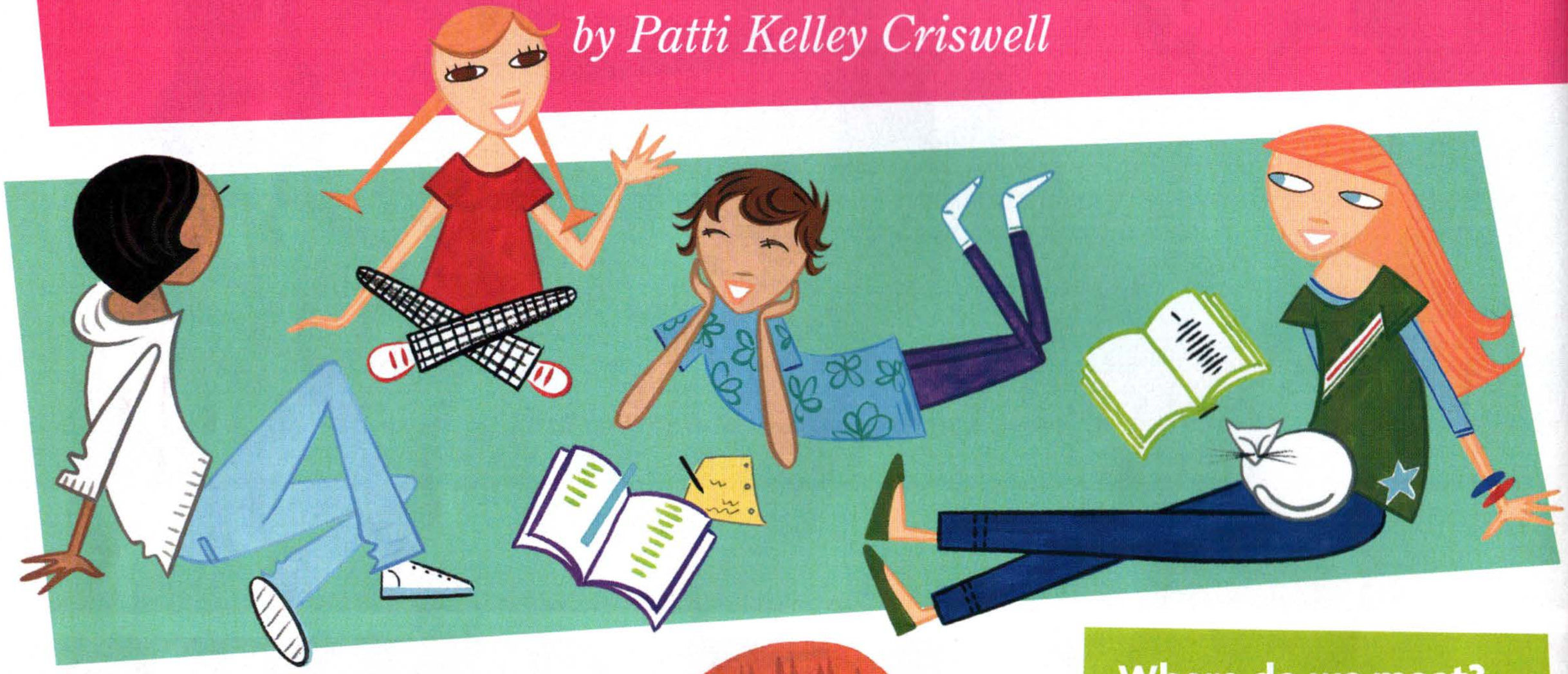


Use a large paper punch to create little tags. String them on a ribbon. ★

Book Buds

Want to start a book club with your friends? First, answer these questions to make sure that you're all on the same page.

by Patti Kelley Criswell



Who's in charge?

The *host*, or girl whose home you're meeting in, keeps the meeting going, keeps track of time, and makes sure everyone gets a chance to talk. You may want to have an adult help lead the first few meetings and then begin taking turns leading the group.

When do we meet?

Many book clubs meet once a month for about an hour. Pick a day of the week and a time that works for everyone, such as a weekday evening, a weekend morning, or even over the lunch break at school. You may need to ask your parents for help with scheduling.



Where do we meet?

You can meet at the same house each time or take turns meeting at one another's homes. Find a quiet space where you can sit at a table or in a circle. If space is tight or there are distractions at home, check to see if the library has a room you can use. Schools, too, often let clubs use space during lunch or after school.

What do we talk about?

Open up the conversation with a simple question, such as, "How did you like the book?" Give each girl a chance to answer, and then come up with more questions. You could ask, "Which character changed the most in this story?" or "What will you remember most about this story?"

The longest book title in the world contains 290 words!



What if we disagree?

That's what it's all about—sharing different points of view. Respect comes to those who give it, so be respectful of others even when you disagree. If someone is being hurtful to you, say, "Ouch!" or "I respect that you feel differently than I do, but I stand by what I said."

Who picks the books?

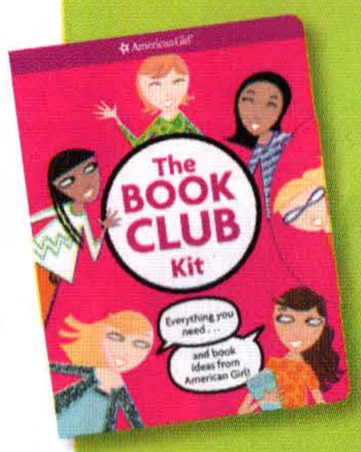
This is the fun part—you all do! You can choose from lists of good books, or you can brainstorm your own list of favorites.

What if I don't finish the book?

Let's face it—sometimes life gets too busy. If you didn't finish the book, answer as many questions as you can and pass on the ones you can't. The group will miss your comments and you'll miss sharing them, which might motivate you to finish the next book.

What if I don't know what to say?

Relax, and really listen to the question. If you need more time, say, "Hmm, I'll have to think about that. Can you come back to me?" Listen to what the other girls have to say, and keep thinking about the question. Let the group know when you are ready to give your answer.



More book-club ideas can be found in *The Book Club Kit*, available in bookstores.



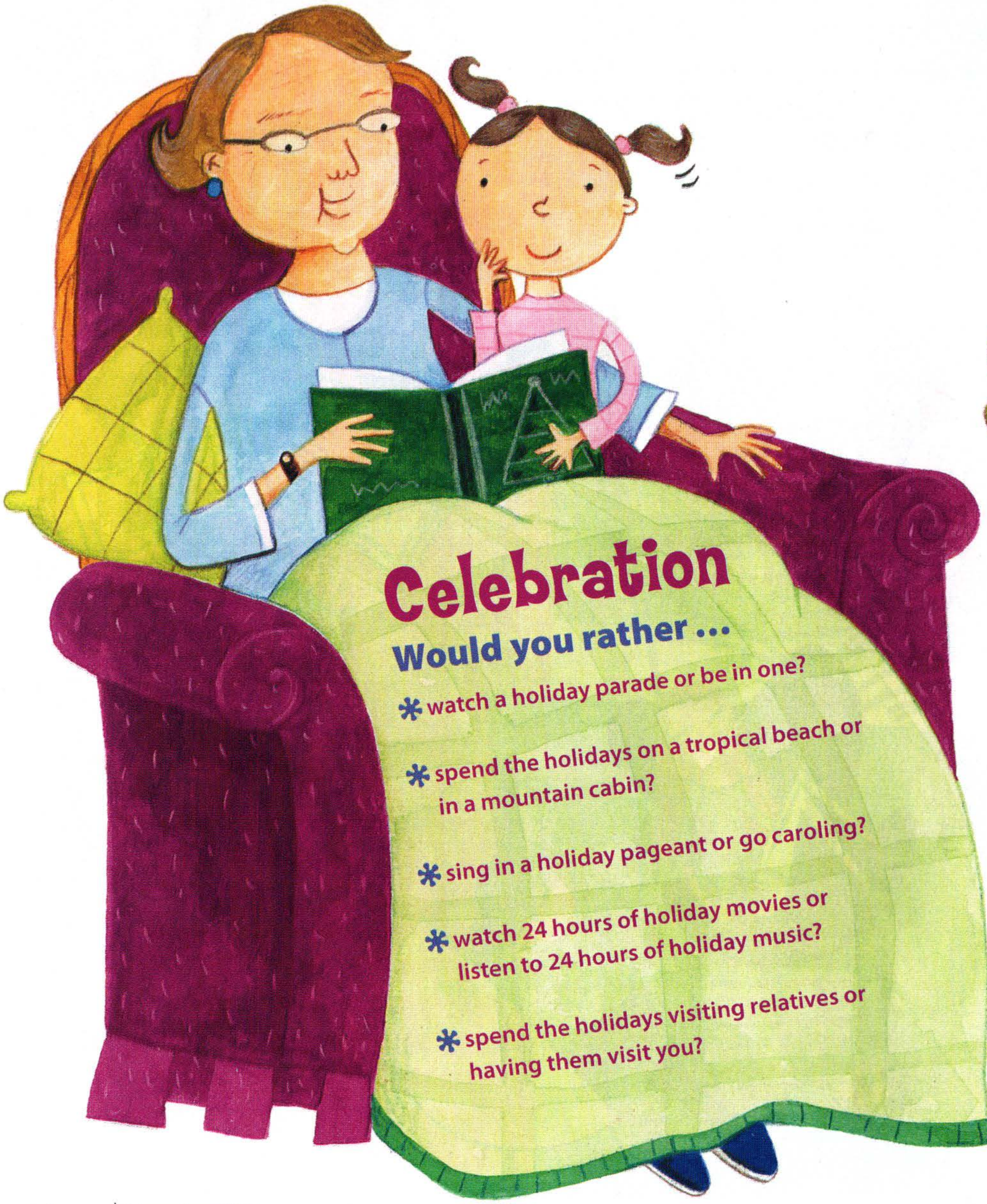
You can win everything needed to start your own book club, from tote bags to books to snacks! Turn to page 2 to find out how to enter. ★



Illustrations: Ali Douglass

Holiday Fun for the Family

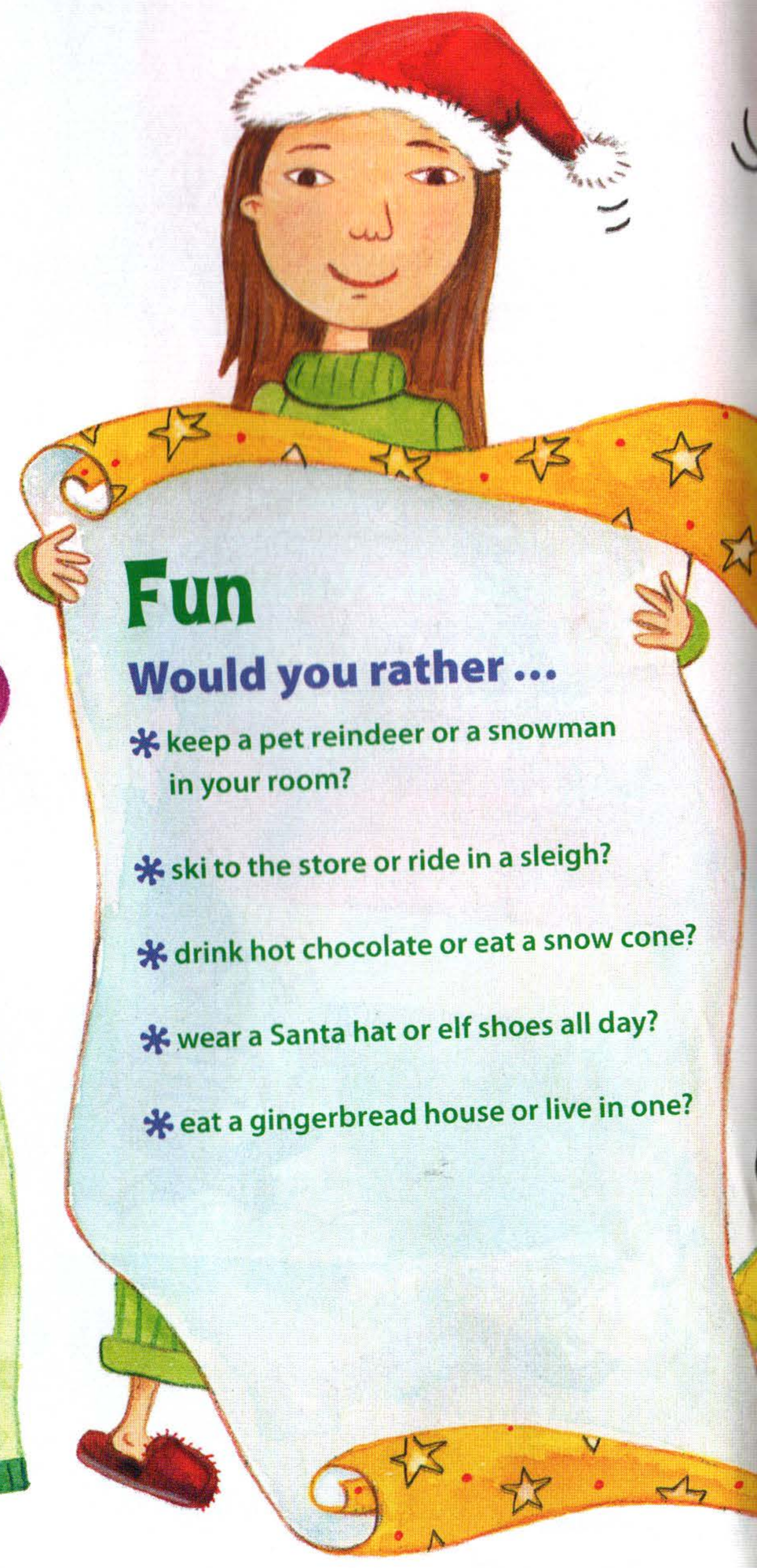
The holidays are almost here! Try this silly quiz with your family to find out how much you have in common.



Celebration

Would you rather ...

* watch a holiday parade or be in one?
* spend the holidays on a tropical beach or in a mountain cabin?
* sing in a holiday pageant or go caroling?
* watch 24 hours of holiday movies or listen to 24 hours of holiday music?
* spend the holidays visiting relatives or having them visit you?



Fun

Would you rather ...

* keep a pet reindeer or a snowman in your room?
* ski to the store or ride in a sleigh?
* drink hot chocolate or eat a snow cone?
* wear a Santa hat or elf shoes all day?
* eat a gingerbread house or live in one?

Presents

Would you rather ...

* get one big gift or lots of little gifts?
* spend all day making a gift or spend your own money to buy a gift?
* open presents in a big rush or take your time with each one?
* be surprised or surprise someone else?
* write sayings for holiday cards or draw pictures for holiday cards?

Flair

Would you rather ...

* make a snow angel or a snowman?
* have a table centerpiece that plays holiday music or one that lights up?
* have every house on the block be decorated, or have 10,000 twinkle lights on your house?
* go without scissors or without tape when wrapping presents?
* frost 100 cookies or wrap 100 presents? ★

Illustrations: Céline Malépart

Cooking

Star Light, Star Bright!

Bake a galaxy of sweet stars.









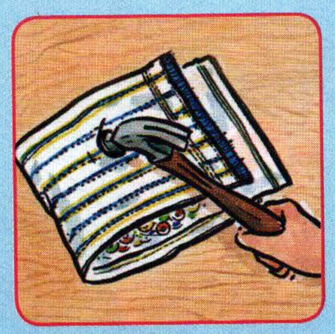


Photo: Howard Bjornson Styling: Tobe LeMoine Illustrations: Shawn Banner



YOU WILL NEED

- An adult to help you
- 1 cup colored hard candies, such as Jolly Ranchers or Life Savers
- Nonstick cooking spray
- 1 stick butter, softened
- ½ cup sugar
- ½ teaspoon vanilla
- 1 egg
- 1½ cups flour
- star cookie cutters (2 sizes)



1 Put unwrapped candies in a plastic zip-lock bag and seal. Place bag in another plastic bag and seal. Wrap in a dish towel and place on a cutting board. Ask an adult to break candy into small bits using a hammer. Set aside. Cover a baking sheet with foil. Spray with nonstick cooking spray. Set aside.



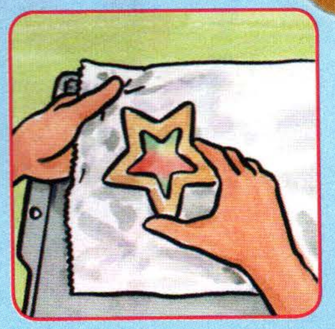
2 Ask an adult to preheat oven to 350 degrees. Wash hands. Combine butter, sugar, and vanilla in bowl with fork. In a separate bowl, beat egg with fork. Add to butter mixture and mix well. Stir in flour. Squeeze mixture with your hands to form dough. If dough feels sticky, add a little more flour.



3 Sprinkle flour on work surface and roll dough to ¼-inch thickness. Cut out cookies using larger star cookie cutter. Place cookies on baking sheet. Dip the smaller star cookie cutter in flour and cut small stars out of large star cookies. Remove small stars and set aside to reroll and reuse dough.



4 Ask an adult to bake cookies 4 minutes, and then remove baking sheet from oven. Carefully put candy pieces inside each star, making sure to fill in tips of stars. (Candy will melt and spread.) Ask an adult to bake cookies again until candy is just melted and dough is light brown, about 5 to 7 more minutes.



5 Ask an adult to remove baking sheet from oven. Let cookies stand until completely cool, about 30 minutes. (If you try to remove cookies too soon, they will crack.) Peel foil off backs of cookies. Now you can nibble the cookie crusts and savor the hard candy centers! ★

Friendship Matters

Gifts with Heart

Celebrate the holidays with one of the best presents of all—friendship!

Friendship Tree

Hang handmade ornaments featuring your friends from a mini tree. Cut colorful paper into different holiday shapes and glue a friend's photo in the middle of each. Write captions for the photos, like "Florida 2007" or "Best Friends." Use ribbon to hang the ornaments from the tree.





Group Get-Together

Pick a theme and host a mini party. Base your outfit and the food on the theme. Don't forget your camera! Here are some ideas:

- **Santa's Elves: dress in red and green and eat pepperoni and green pepper pizza.**
- **Snow Day: wear all white and serve vanilla ice cream with marshmallows on top.**
- **Shining Star: add silver or some sparkly flair to your outfit and snack on brightly wrapped candies.**

Snow Pals

Sculpt a couple of new friends out of snow. Your new friends could be snow pets or snow girls. Don't forget to add scarves, sunglasses, and smiles—and round up your real friends for a silly photo. Say "Freeze!"



Crooning Companions

Pick a holiday song, such as "The Twelve Days of Christmas," and change the words to make it a friendship song. Try, "On the fourth day of winter, my best friend gave to me four friendship bracelets…" Sing the complete song (with your friends) to your family.



Chocolate for Chums

Set up a hot chocolate bar to keep your friends warm and cozy. Taste-test different cocoa combos, and write down your favorites on recipe cards. Include some of these things:



- candy canes
- whipped cream
- butterscotch chips
- marshmallows
- peanut butter
- sprinkles
- ice cream
- cherries
- flavored hot chocolate mix

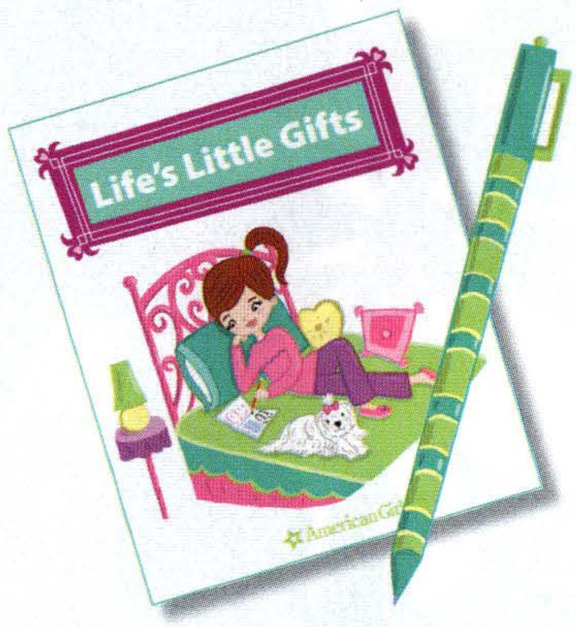
Browse with a Buddy

All you need is a stack of old catalogues to play this fun game. Pair up with a friend and create a collage of all the gifts you think she would like—you have only 15 minutes to do it! Exchange your collages at the end and see what you think of the funny gifts you chose for each other.



Capture the Memories

Record some of the fun moments spent with family and friends in AG's booklet called *Life's Little Gifts*. When you write down a memory, you can always look back and smile! ★



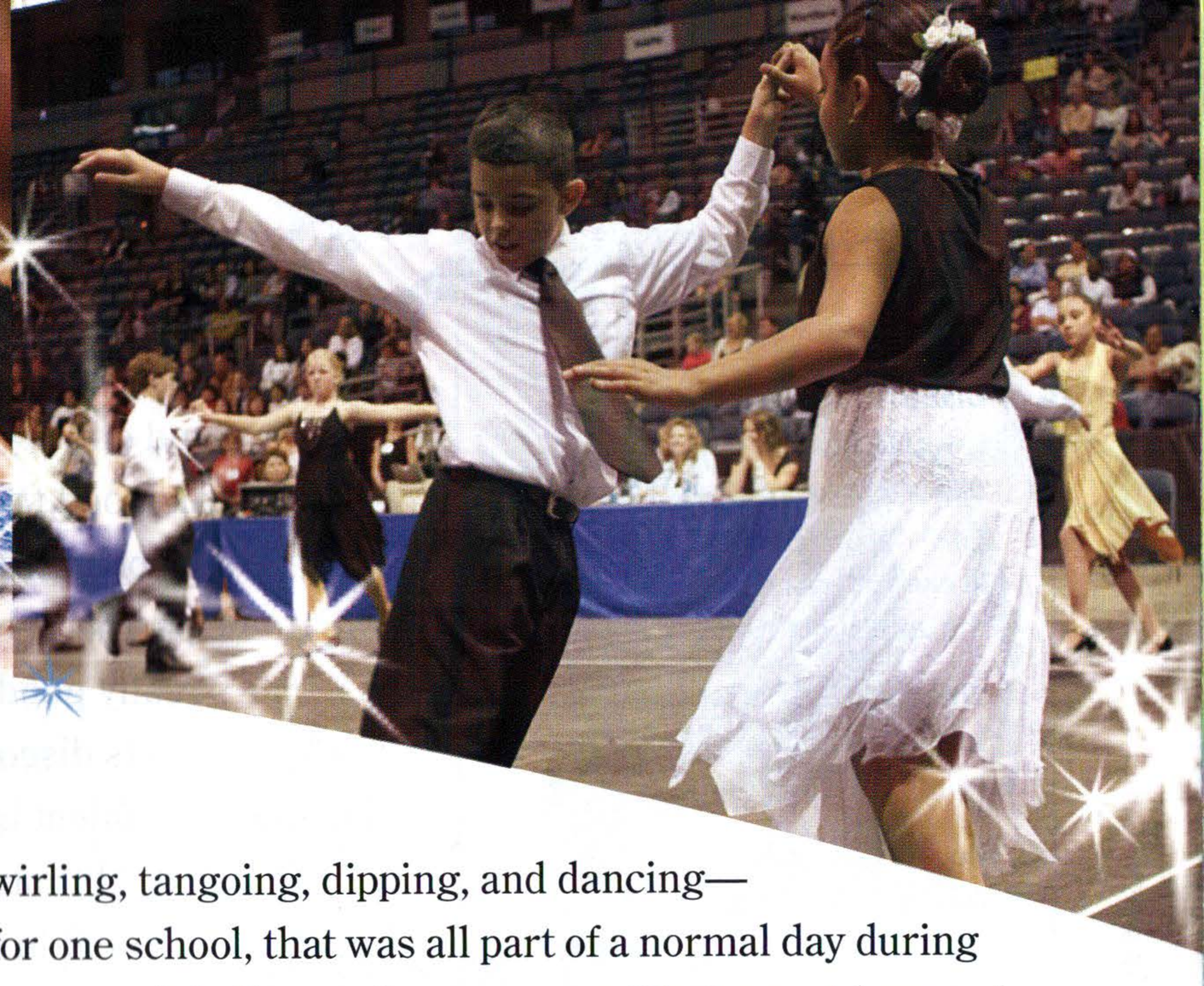
Illustrations: Cathi Mingus

Dancing Like the Stars



These kids sparkled in the spotlight after a class in school gave them dance fever!





Performing Tips

Here are a few things judges look for during a dance competition:

- Confidence—smiling and not concentrating too hard on the moves
- Timing—really listening to the music and staying on beat
- Head—looking up, to the side, or down, depending on the dance
- Dance position—standing tall with arms tight

Tango

Corina L. and Michael S.

Tango is a dramatic and smooth dance in which the footwork is very important. The partners look away from each other and the music is instrumental.

When you are performing:
"Focus on your partner."

Tip about boys:
"Don't be afraid, because they are not going to bite you!"

Photos: Darren Hauck

Twirling, tangoing, dipping, and dancing—for one school, that was all part of a normal day during a ten-week ballroom dance course. That meant hours of practicing and memorizing steps for the rumba, the tango, and the salsa, and it was all in preparation for a citywide competition featuring the best dancers in the school. But it also meant something else—new friendships.

Excited to learn new dances, the girls had only one concern: "The teacher told us we had to look at the boys while we danced. I didn't want to, so I looked at the top of the boy's head," says Damaris S. "We weren't used to touching boys," adds Corina L.

The boys had another concern—they thought dancing with girls would be boring. But after giving some new moves a try, the boys were ready to lace up their dancing shoes every day. "We're so into it now, it's unreal," says Michael S. The girls feel more comfortable, too. "Now it's not a big deal. It's like, 'Let's go dance!'" Corina adds.



Corina L. and Michael S.

Salsa

Diana N. and Vicente C.

Salsa is a fun and fast-paced dance with relaxed arms and quick turns. The partners look at each other while dancing to the upbeat Latin music.

When you are performing:

"Just have fun! Don't worry that you're in a competition."

How to cucaracha:

(koo-kah-RAH-chah)

Start with feet together. Step to the side with your left foot and place weight on it as you sway your hip to the left. Step back together. Now step out with right foot and place weight on it as you sway your hip to the right. Step back together. Repeat three times.

Watch Diana and Vicente dance the salsa! See if you can recognize the cucaracha step. Go to "Fun for Girls" at **americangirl.com**.

Cucaracha means "cockroach" in Spanish.

The class started dancing before school, after school, and in the hallways during school. The dance teacher paired up partners based on height and on who could move well together. Soon, the boys and girls became good friends. Partners Diana N. and Vicente C. say they are now best friends. "When we started dancing, we didn't want to be partners, but then we became like family," says Diana. "Vicente's really good at dancing."

The students discovered talent they didn't even know they had. "I'm more confident in myself because I know how to dance well," says Damaris. "I thought it was really hard at first, but now that I know it, I can do it in my sleep," adds Vicente.

As the citywide competition grew nearer, the dance teacher chose three couples to represent the school—one each for the tango, the salsa, and the rumba. Two alternate couples were chosen in case anything happened to the other dancers. They had to be ready to perform any of the three dances at a moment's notice.



Diana N. and Vicente C.



On the day of the competition, the dancers were excited and nervous—they had to compete against 21 other schools. But all three couples were euphoric when they found out they'd made it to the semifinals. Partners Michael and Corina even danced their way to the tango finals! In the final round, their classmates cheered, the music blasted, and the audience yelled "T-A-N-G-O!" as the couples danced. Michael and Corina didn't win, but they still had a good time. "Just making it to the finals is really big," says Michael.

The class has enjoyed their new friendships and ballroom dancing so much that they won't stop anytime soon. "We're still going to practice in class even though it's over," says Daniel. "It's fun, and that's the part that counts," Diana adds. ★

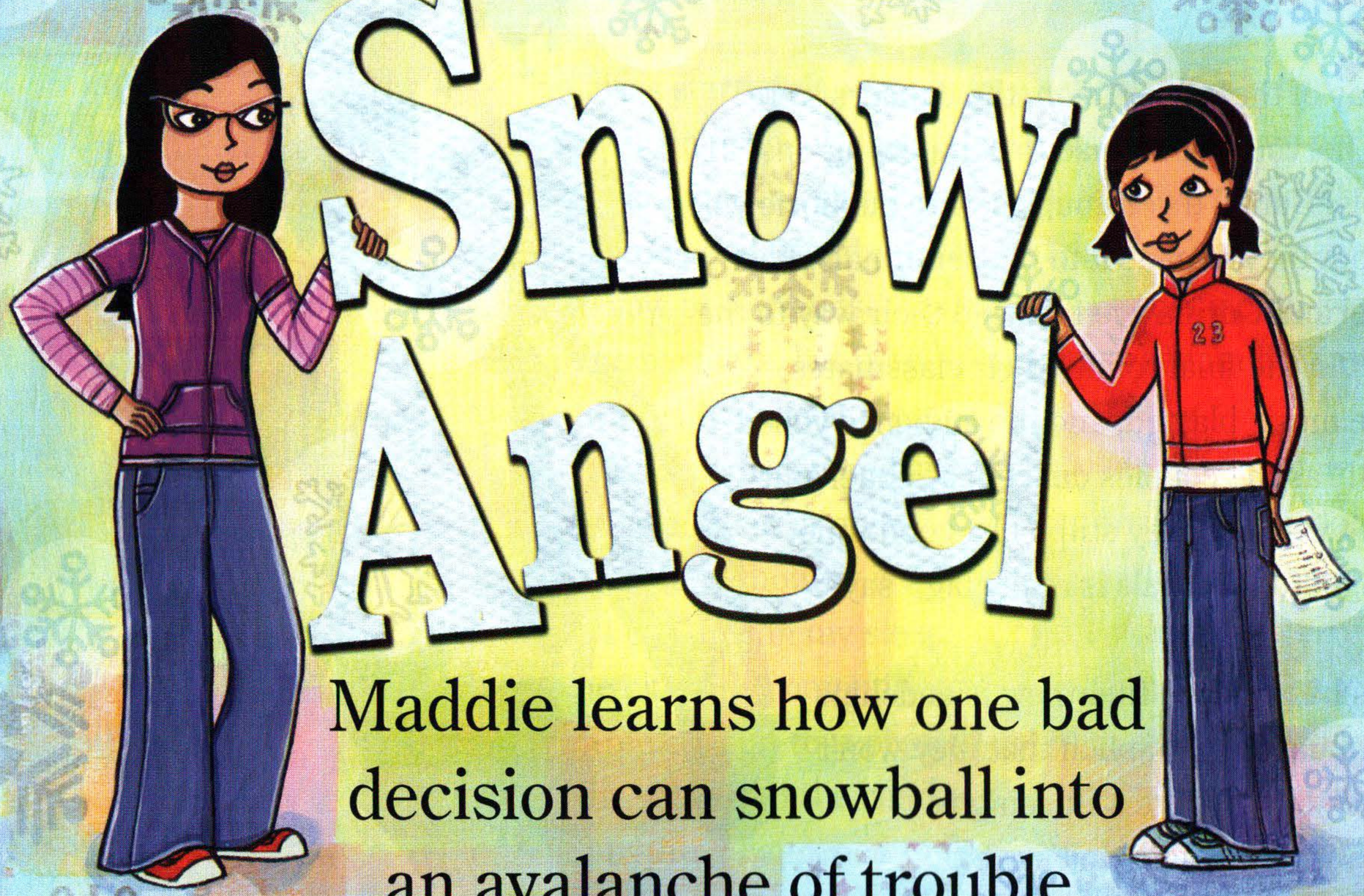
Rumba

Damaris S. and Daniel I.
Rumba is a slow, romantic dance with swaying hip motions. The partners make eye contact during the dance.

When you are performing:
"Keep a big smile!"

Fun Fact:
Damaris did the all of the girls' hair in her class for the competition.





Snow Angel

Maddie learns how one bad decision can snowball into an avalanche of trouble.

by Megan McDonald



Maddie Evan Donahue was in big trouble—homework trouble. The kind of trouble that makes your mother call you by your full name. This time, her mother couldn't say "Madeline Evan Donahue, what were you thinking leaving your homework till the last minute?" Because her mother didn't know.

Only Maddie knew that her poem for English was due first thing Monday. It had been niggling at her, in the back of her mind, all weekend—before her basketball game, while she practiced cello, on the way to Gram's house for Sunday dinner.

So much for Christmas spirit. Just thinking about writing a holiday poem made Maddie feel grinchy.

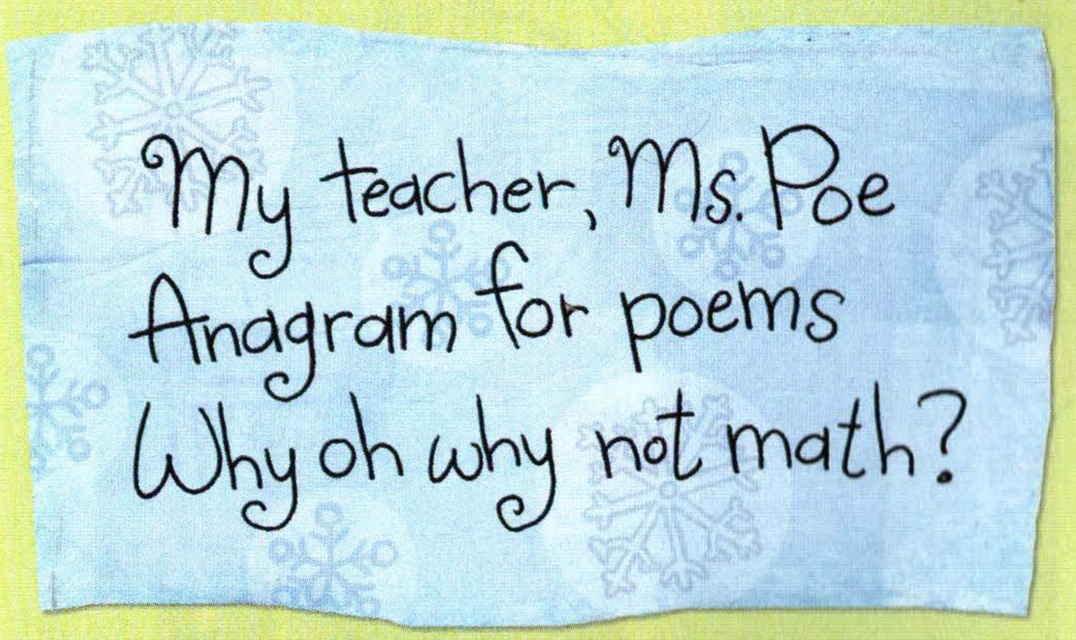
Since they'd gotten home from Gram's, Maddie had had more important things to do, like 1. find the ratio of s's and p's in the word *Mississippi* for math; 2. play "Spy Girl" on the computer; and 3. work on her finger-knitting project, which now stretched all the way down the hall to her sister Charlotte's room.

Charlotte, her older sister by two and a half years, was Miss Perfect. She could recite the first 121 digits of pi. She won gift certificates for school contests. And she did NOT need to be reminded to do her homework. Ever. Majorly annoying.

A little prickle of jealousy ran up Maddie's spine. Charlotte was great at writing poems. Charlotte was creative. And two years ago, when Charlotte had had the same teacher for English—poem-crazy Ms. Poe—she had always gotten a check-plus or a check-plus-plus.

Charlotte…poems…Ms. Poe…homework…English. The words swirled around in Maddie's brain, scrambling and unscrambling themselves like a whatchamacallit—an anagram. Of course! *Ms. Poe* was an anagram for *poems.* Maddie remembered her teacher writing it on the board. No wonder she went so cuckoo over poetry.

Poems was also an anagram for *mopes,* Maddie realized. Maybe she could write a haiku. Three lines, seventeen syllables. How hard could it be?



Maddie counted the syllables. Only sixteen. Whatever.

Suddenly, Maddie had an idea—an idea that would solve her homework problem AND get her a check-plus-plus! It was so simple—easier than haiku.

Maddie tiptoed to the landing and listened. Charlotte was practicing violin, which would take at least an hour. The coast was clear.

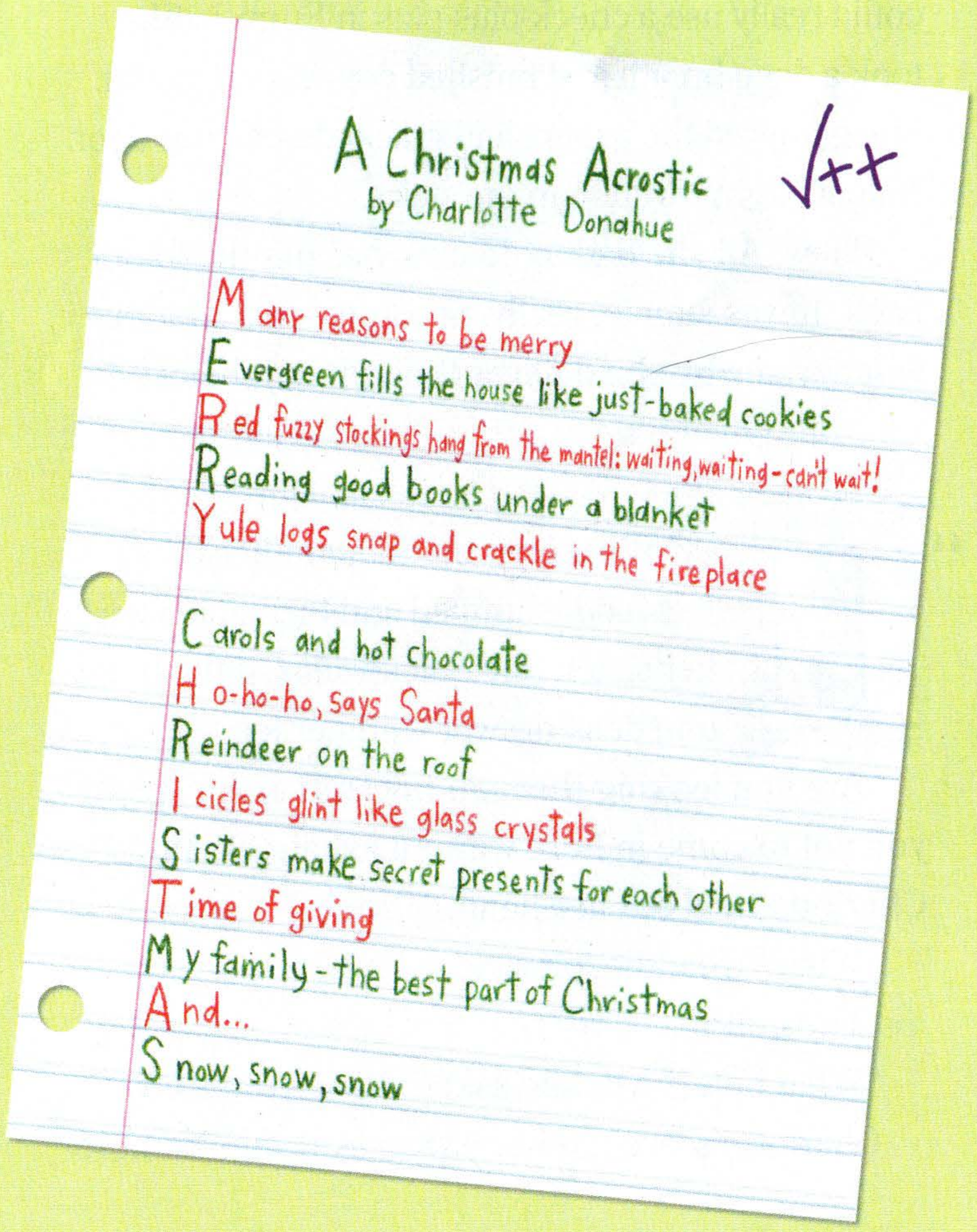
Sneaking back up the stairs, Maddie noticed the message board on Charlotte's door where the words PRIVATE KEEP OUT were spelled out in magnets. Maddie ignored it. Mouselike, she scurried over to Charlotte's desk, glanced behind her, and then quietly coaxed open the bottom desk drawer where Charlotte kept all her school papers.

Shuffle, shuffle. Rustle, rustle. Eureka! At the very bottom of the drawer was a purple folder marked "Poems. Ms. Poe. 5th Grade."

Score one for Maddie.



Back in the safety of her own room, Maddie leafed through the papers in the folder. In no time, one poem jumped out at her. The first letter of each line was drawn in red or green. *A Christmas Acrostic by Charlotte Donahue.* Perfect!


A Christmas Acrostic
by Charlotte Donahue
√++

Many reasons to be merry
Evergreen fills the house like just-baked cookies
Red fuzzy stockings hang from the mantel: waiting, waiting - can't wait!
Reading good books under a blanket
Yule logs snap and crackle in the fireplace

Carols and hot chocolate
Ho-ho-ho, says Santa
Reindeer on the roof
Icicles glint like glass crystals
Sisters make secret presents for each other
Time of giving
My family - the best part of Christmas
And...
Snow, snow, snow

Illustrations: Jennifer Kalis

Maddie didn't know what a yule log was, but that didn't matter. What did matter was that Ms. Poe had given Charlotte's poem a check-plus-plus!

Heart pounding, Maddie took a sheet of paper and carefully started copying. *A Christmas Acrostic by Char*—oops! *by* Maddie *Donahue.*

Maddie copied the poem, minus the red and green letters. What if Ms. Poe remembered it? Maddie told herself that that was impossible. Still, she couldn't quite get her racing heart to calm down. A tiny voice inside her whispered that it was wrong to pass the poem off as her own. But a bigger, louder voice convinced her that it was just a stupid homework assignment. Who would know, anyway? And Charlotte wouldn't care.

Or would she? Maddie wasn't sure anymore. Her sister was different this year—moody and prickly and…private. But Maddie reminded herself that she could really use a check-plus-plus in English. She took a deep breath and finished copying the poem. She gathered the papers and cracked open her door. "Silent Night" drifted up the stairs.

Phew! All she had to do now was put the folder back. It was simple, really. So simple that Maddie wondered why she'd never thought of it before.

"Hey! What are you doing in here?"

Maddie jumped and turned to face her sister. She quickly closed the bottom desk drawer with her leg.

"Are you looking through my stuff again? I told you not to come in here without asking me first." Charlotte held out her hand. "Give it."

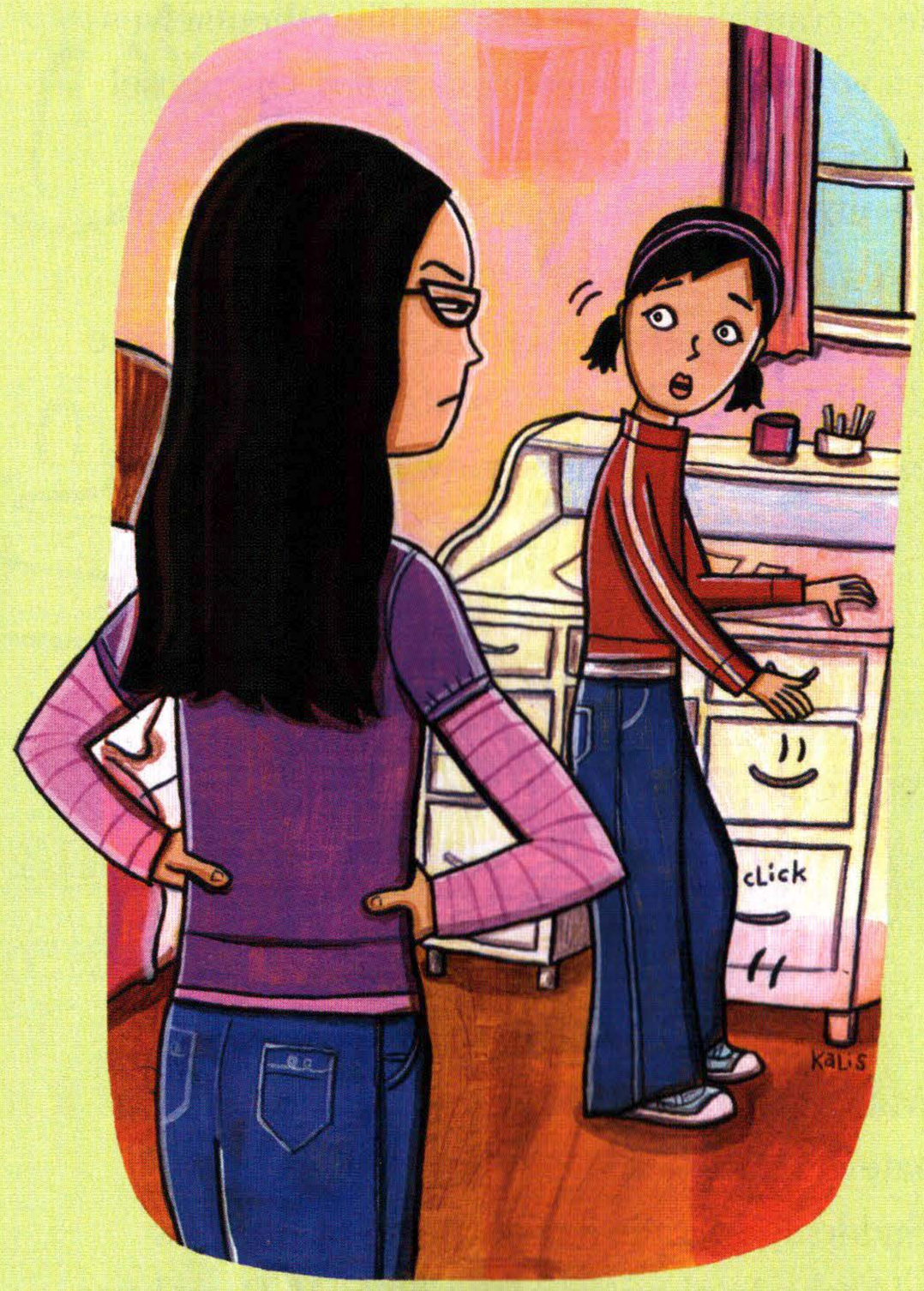
"What?" Maddie felt sick.

"The note."

"What note?" Maddie asked. "Is it from a boy?"

Charlotte searched her sister. Nothing. No note.

"Out!" said Charlotte, pointing to the door, and Maddie thought that was the end of it.



Wednesday morning

On Monday, Ms. Poe had collected all the holiday poems. On Wednesday, she announced that she'd read them.

Oh, no. Here it comes.

"Class, I know some of you struggle with writing poetry. But these were, on the whole, very good."

Maddie crossed her fingers under her desk. *Please, please, please let me get a check-plus-plus.* She squirmed as Ms. Poe passed back the poems.

With one last paper in her hand, Ms. Poe motioned to Maddie with her finger. "Maddie, may I speak with you a moment?"

Uh-oh. Maddie felt her heart sink like a stone in water. She could almost hear it clunk in the pit of her stomach as she walked up to Ms. Poe's desk.

"This poem was quite unusual for you."

Gulp.

"I know poetry isn't really your thing. And your poems are usually, well…short."

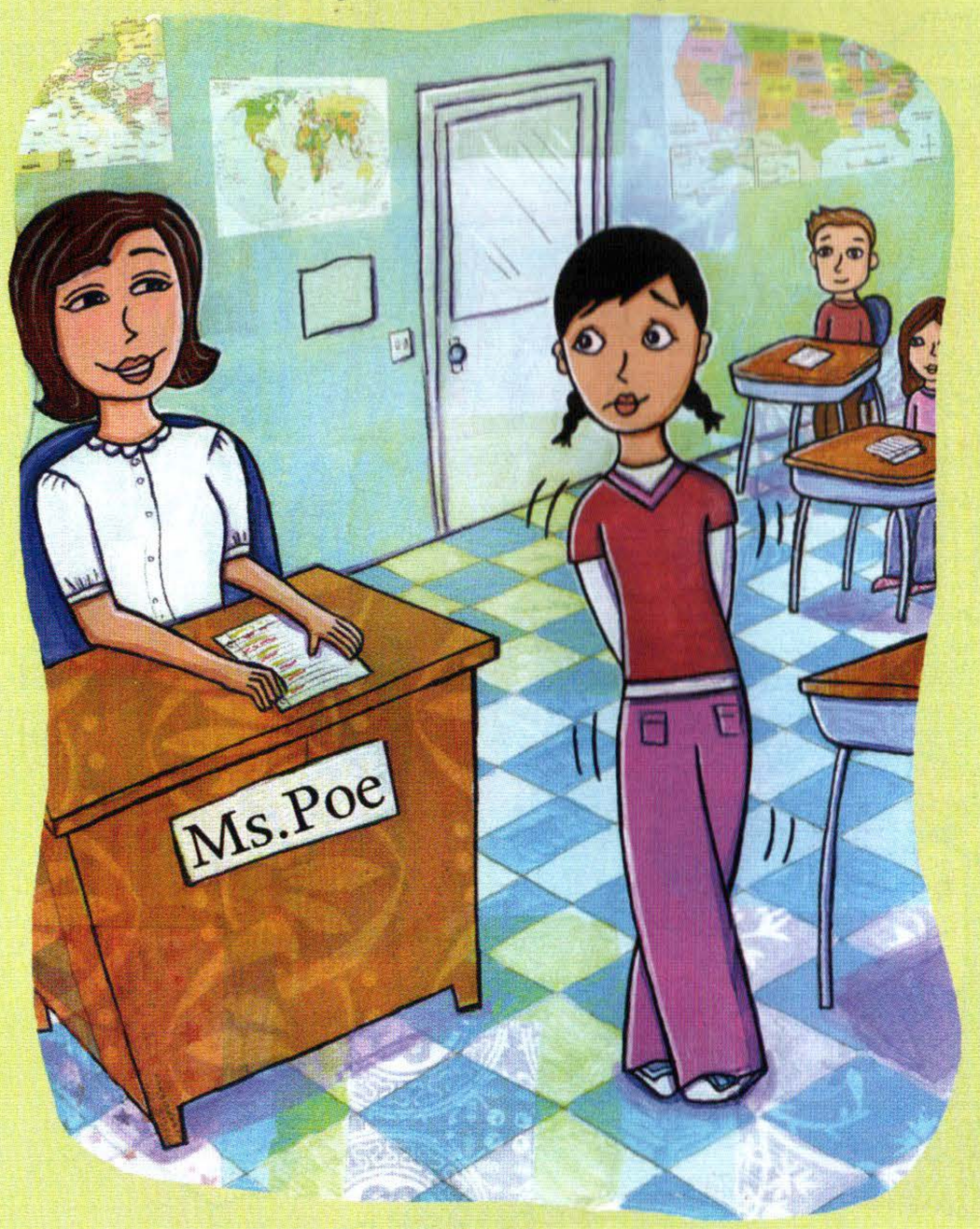
Squeak. Maddie knew she had a voice, but all that came out was a tiny bird sound.

"Don't you think?"

"No, it wasn't. It was usual. Honest," Maddie croaked. She stood with all her weight on one leg, the other leg twisted around it. It seemed as if just the sound of Ms. Poe's voice might knock her over.

"Anyway, I was thinking. How would you like to read your poem aloud for the Winter Holiday Program at school next Thursday evening?"

Maddie stood on two feet again. "You mean... me? That's what you wanted? To ask about…? Um…I can't. I mean…there are so many other kids who are way better at poetry."

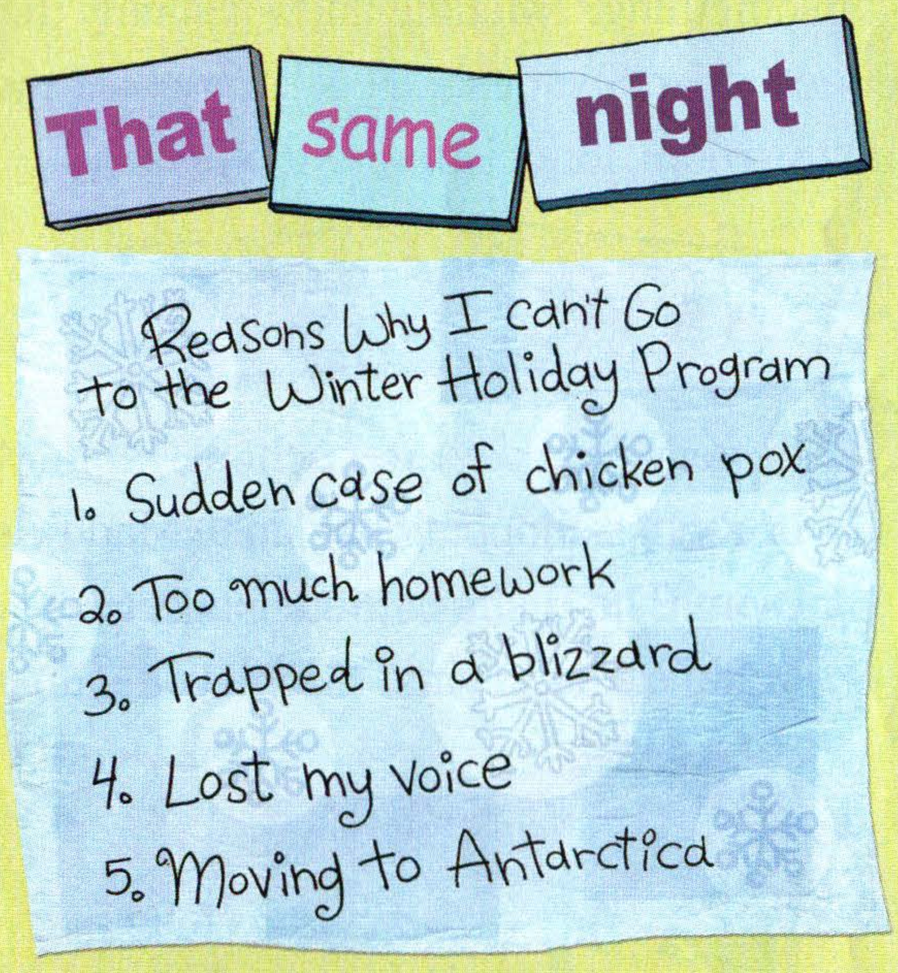


"That's why I want you," said Ms. Poe. "We don't always have to stand out for the thing we're best at. Let's show them poetry's for everybody. I bet your family would love to see you onstage, hear what good work you're doing."

"I guess," Maddie heard herself saying.

"Then it's settled," said Ms. Poe, smiling.

Maddie reached for the paper. But even the bright red check-plus-plus did not take away the hard lump in her stomach.



Maddie hadn't breathed a word to her family about the Winter Holiday Program. Maybe she could just stay home, and nobody would miss her.

Then, at dinner, Maddie's mother tapped on a glass of milk and said, "I think Maddie has something exciting to tell us."

"I do?"

"You know. About the holiday program?"

Huh? Who told her?

"I ran into your friend Alison's mother. She told me that you were chosen to read a poem."

"Ms. Poe? She picked *you* to read a poem?" asked Charlotte, as if Maddie had just announced that she'd been chosen to fly the shuttle to outer space.

"It's no big deal. Really," said Maddie.

"Of course it's a big deal," said Mom. "We'll have to get you a new dress, and—"

"No!" said Maddie, a little too forcefully. "I mean, it's Christmas, and I know everything costs a lot."

"Never mind that," said Mom.

"What's your poem about?" asked Charlotte.

"It's about Christmas, O.K.? What else would it be about?" Maddie snapped. "And why is everybody asking ten million questions like I did something wrong or something?" Maddie knew instantly that she'd gone too far. She pushed back her chair and ran from the room, fork clattering to the floor.

Thursday afternoon

The very next day after school, Mom brought a shopping bag up to Maddie's room. The rustle of tissue paper made Maddie's heart sink. "Mom, you didn't—"

"I did!" said Mom, grinning and pulling a shimmery green dress out of the bag.

"Mom, no!" Maddie said, falling back on the bed.

"What's wrong? You don't like it?" Mom asked. "But this is the one you and Charlotte were cooing over in that cute little shop downtown."

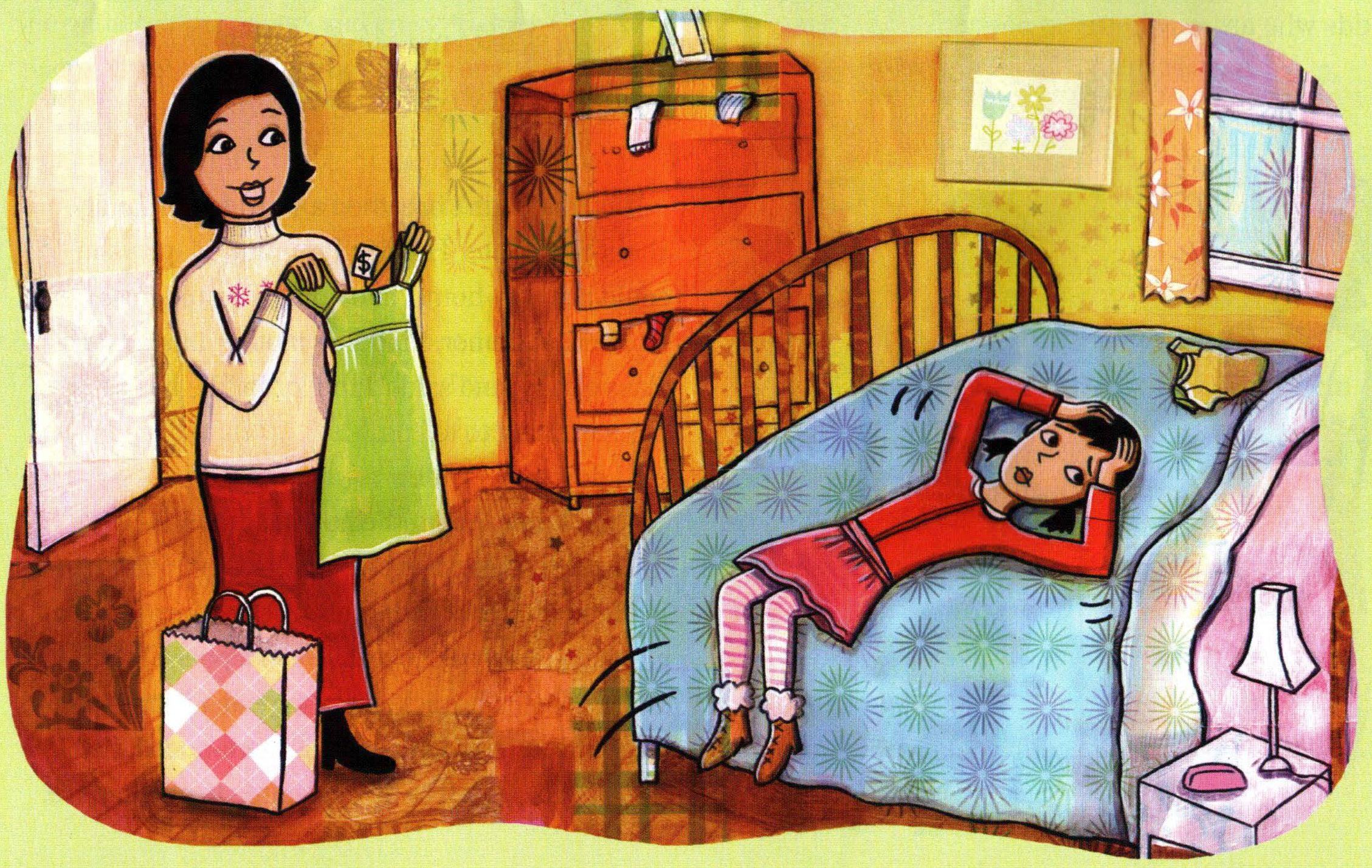
Maddie sat back up. "Mom, it's not that I don't love it. It's just that...well..." *Speak up. Tell the truth. Just say it.*

"It's just what, honey?"

"It's just that...it's too expensive. Can we really afford it? The program is just a school thing. One night, for like an hour."

"I thought you could wear it for the family picture on our Christmas card. And to church on Christmas Eve. And to Gram's for Christmas dinner."

Christmas, Christmas, Christmas. Normally, Maddie would have loved the dress. But tonight, if Mom said *Christmas* one more time, she thought she might scream.



The big night

For a whole week, Maddie carried her secret inside—heavy, like a backpack full of rocks that she had to haul everywhere she went.

Why don't I just say something? She didn't want to disappoint her whole family, but the longer she waited, the harder it got to speak up.

Then, before she knew it, the day came.

Mom and Dad came home from work early. Gram came over and cooked a special dinner. Even Charlotte got dressed up.

Maddie looked out the window, hoping for snow. Not a flake. She tested her voice. Still there.

Maddie put on her new dress. Everyone said she looked wonderful, but Maddie felt itchy. Maybe she was coming down with chicken pox after all!

No such luck. Maddie found herself smushed between Charlotte and Gram in the car. And to make matters worse, Charlotte had to go and be extra nice. She leaned over and whispered, "Maddie, you're going to do great!"

Maddie glanced at the program in her hand one, two, three…five times. It was right there in black and white. *A Christmas Acrostic, written and performed by Maddie Donahue.* The fourth-graders were singing a medley and she was up next. She heard her name announced, and somehow her legs carried her down the aisle and up the steps onto the stage.

Maddie stood alone in front of the microphone. She blinked in the bright light. Could she really go through with it?

She cleared her throat once. Again.

What else could she do? It was too late now. Too late, too late…



Maddie couldn't help looking out at her proud family. "Go ahead, Maddie," Ms. Poe whispered, poking her head out from behind the curtain.

"A Christmas Acrostic," she started, "by Maddie Donahue."

Her head felt hot. Her throat felt sore. She coughed, as if it would help her dislodge the words stuck in the back of her throat.

If only Maddie could think of another poem on the spot. But even as her brain searched for different words, she heard her own voice betray her.

"Many reasons to be merry. Evergreen fills the house like just-baked cookies…" Maddie rushed through the poem, stringing all the words together. In a minute, it would be over.

She heard her voice land on the word *snow.* Eyes glued to the paper in front of her, she willed herself not to look up, not to look out at Charlotte.

Clapping. The audience was clapping. She'd done it. But instead of feeling relief, all she could think of was how she'd betrayed her sister and lied to everyone else.

Maddie swallowed. A taste of old pennies caught in her mouth. She cleared her throat one last time.

"Um," she heard herself say. Nobody seemed to hear. She tapped on the microphone. "Excuse me. I have something to say." The room grew quiet. "I…I…made a mistake." Without taking a breath, she let the words come out in one big gush. "I'm sorry I said the poem was mine. Actually, my sister Charlotte wrote it. And I just wanted everyone to know. Thank you. I'm sorry."

As Maddie made her way to the edge of the stage, she waded through a swarming group of costumed little kids. Ms. Poe held the curtain open for her and said, "We'll talk about this tomorrow."

As soon as they got to the car, Maddie said, "Mom, Dad, I can explain—"

"I don't want to get into this while I'm driving," said Dad. "Let's talk at home." For the rest of the ride, Maddie shifted uncomfortably in the middle of the backseat.

After Gram left, before Maddie could say a word, Charlotte started in on her. "What a dork. First you steal my poem—did you think I wouldn't know? Then you read it in front of the whole world and think you'll get away with it?"

"No, that's not it," Maddie said. "You don't understand, 'cause you're good at everything."

"Well, that doesn't excuse what you did, Maddie," Dad said. "You owe your sister an apology."

Mom had that we-didn't-raise-you-this-way look. When her lips thinned into a straight line, Maddie knew it meant one thing only—disappointment.

"I wish you had told the truth," said Mom. "All Dad and I ask of our kids is that you do your own work and try your best."

"We all have things we're not good at, honey," said Dad. "But it doesn't mean you should give up on yourself."

"I'm sorry," Maddie told her family. "I know that I really messed up. I didn't think—" Maddie's eyes smarted. She didn't know how to tell her family that she never meant for it to go so far.

"It'll be O.K.," said Mom, giving her a sideways hug. "You did the right thing in the end, but you're still going to somehow have to make things right with Ms. Poe tomorrow. Tonight, let's all just get some sleep."

But Maddie couldn't sleep. After apologizing to Charlotte at least ten times, she propped herself up on her bed with her notebook. Tomorrow was the last day of school before winter break. She already knew she'd get a failing grade on her poetry assignment, but the only way she could think of to make it up to Ms. Poe personally was to do what she should have done in the first place—write a new poem. A poem of her own.

Maddie started a line, crossed it out, and wrote some more. She scribbled out a word here, a line there. She tore out the whole sheet, crumpled it, and threw it on the floor.

"Maddie?" Charlotte tapped on the door. "I can hear you growling from all the way in my room."

"I'm trying to write a poem, but—" Frustrated, Maddie tossed another page on the floor.

"Look, writing a poem is no big deal," Charlotte told her, sitting next to her. "Why don't I help you?"

"No!" said Maddie sharply. "I mean, thanks, but I really have to do this by myself."

"Then try to have some fun with it," said Charlotte. "I have an idea." She left the room and came back with her message board and magnets.



"Here, try using my magnets," she said. "There are tons of good words. Just choose some you like, and move them around till they sound interesting."

"O.K., I'll try it. Thanks," said Maddie.

In the quiet of the sleepy house, Maddie played with the magnets. First, she pulled out all the words that reminded her of winter—*snow, white, light, bright, angel.* She arranged and rearranged them, until…

Maddie snapped awake. Morning! She'd fallen asleep sitting up. And she hadn't finished her poem.

Maddie pulled up the shade and peered out her window. Snow! It made the world look clean and new. She watched Charlotte step off the front porch, stick out her tongue, hold her arms wide, and twirl in the falling snow.

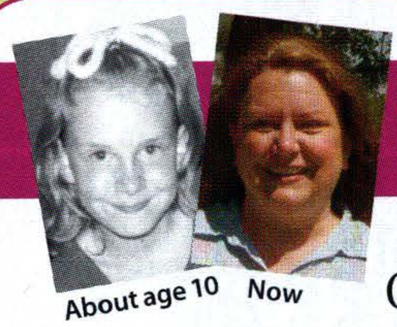
Maddie picked up the message board and played with the magnets one last time. At last she was happy with her poem.

Taking out her notebook, she copied the poem down and signed it—*by Maddie Donahue*—in bold letters. She'd get to school early and leave the poem on Ms. Poe's desk for her teacher to find.

But first, there was one more thing she had to do. Leaving the magnets in place, she took the message board back to Charlotte's room. Instead of hanging it on the door, she propped it up on her sister's pillow, where Charlotte would be sure to find it. ★



Meet the Author



Megan McDonald

Once I looked through my sister's desk drawer and found a story she had written about a girl who discovered a blue rock at the beach that turned out to be beach glass. It was so good that even though I didn't steal it, I did wish I'd written it!

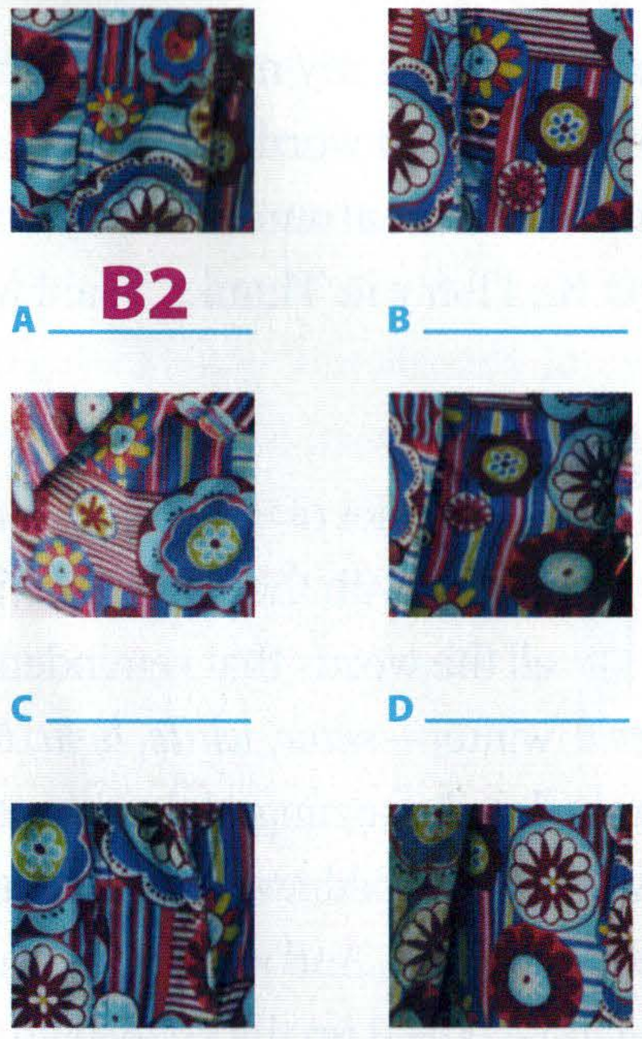
Brainwaves

activities and puzzles

Photo Fun

Seeing double? This funny shot is of Whistler S. and Alexis O., both from Wisconsin. Look at the grid, and write down the letter and number of the area where each pattern came from. We've done the first one for you.





A B2

B _____

C _____

D _____

E _____

F _____

Do **you** have a **fun** photo of yourself with a **friend?** Send it to us and we might use it in AG magazine! Mail your **best** shot to the address on page 2 along with your name, address, and age. Sorry, photos can't be returned.

Take a Good Look

Study this cozy scene and make a list of the names of things that have *oo* in them. There are at least 20!



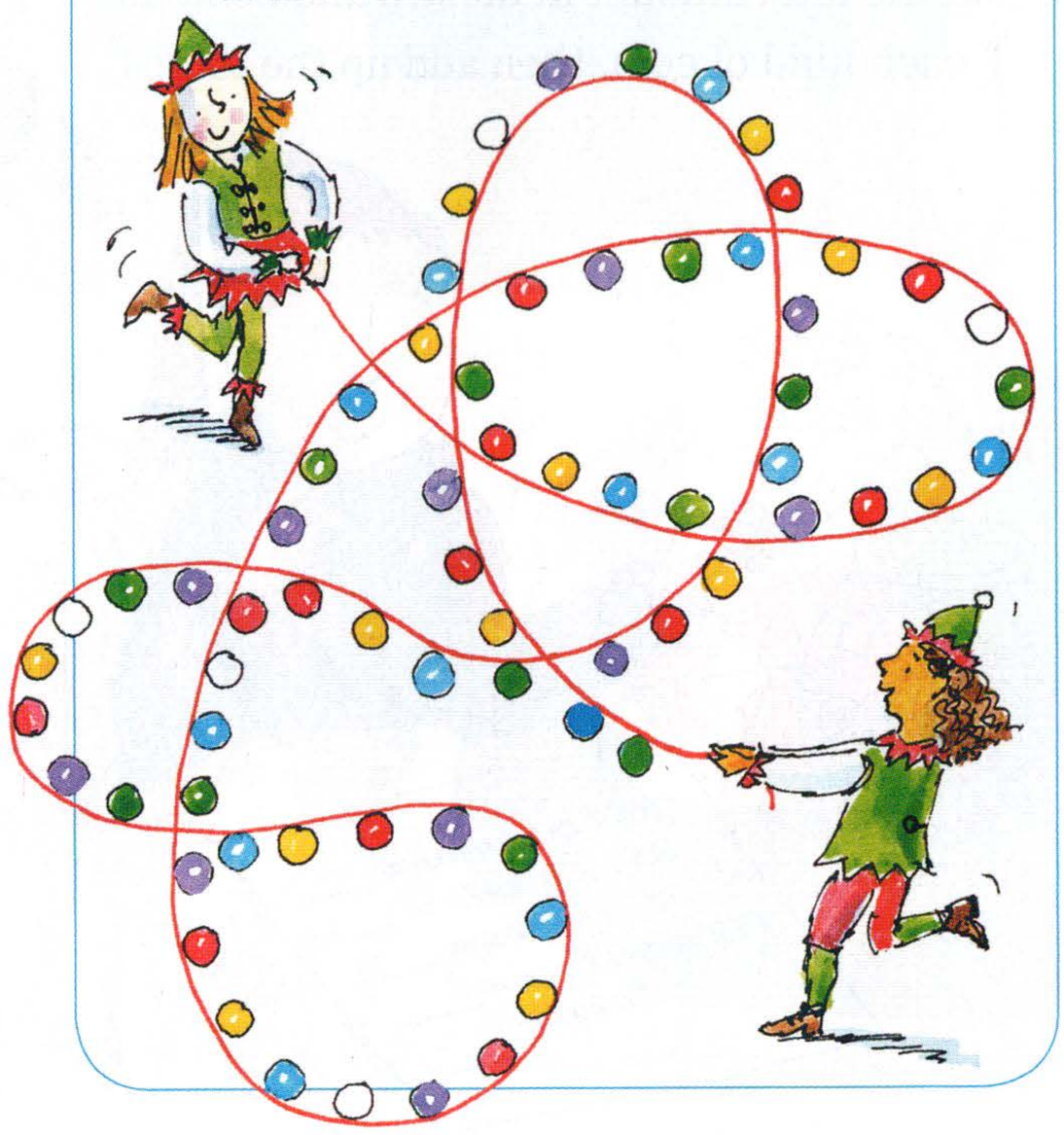
Flake Fun

Circle all the flakes that have only four sides. There are ten!



Elf Help

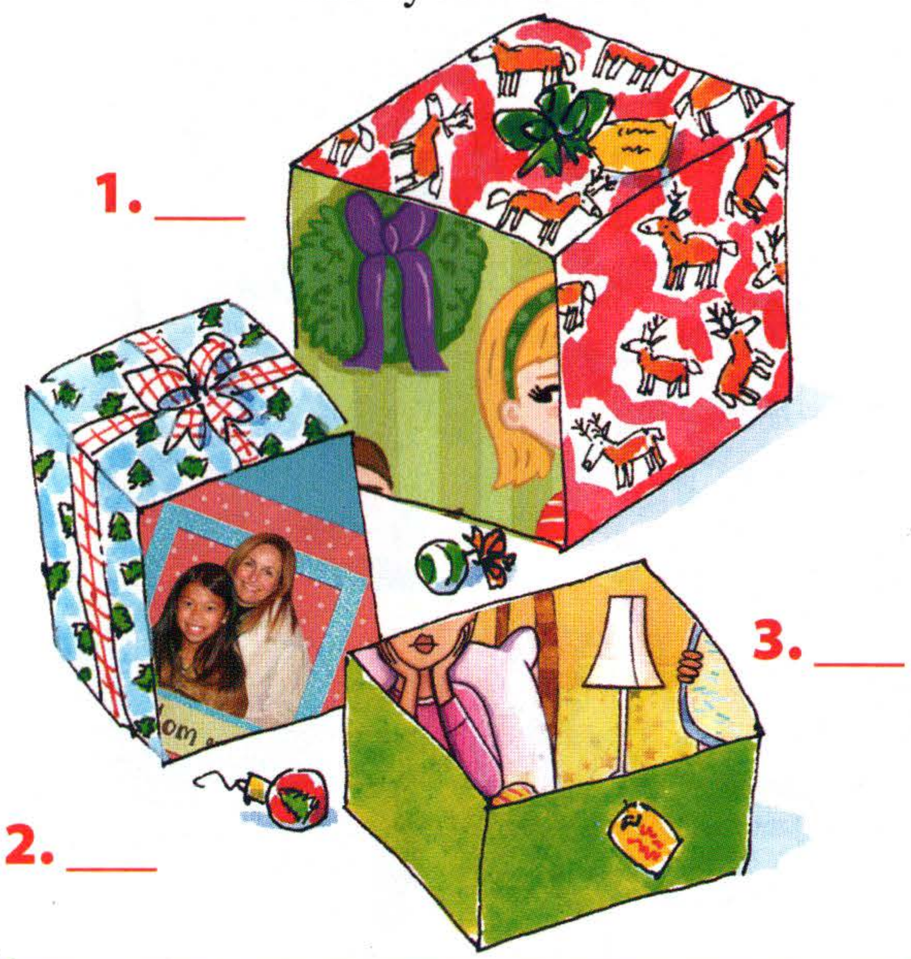
See if you can figure out which color each of the white ornaments should be.



Illustrations: Paul Meisel

Art Sleuth

Search through this issue to find each snippet of photo or illustration shown below. Write down the number of the page on which you found it.



1. ___

2. ___

3. ___

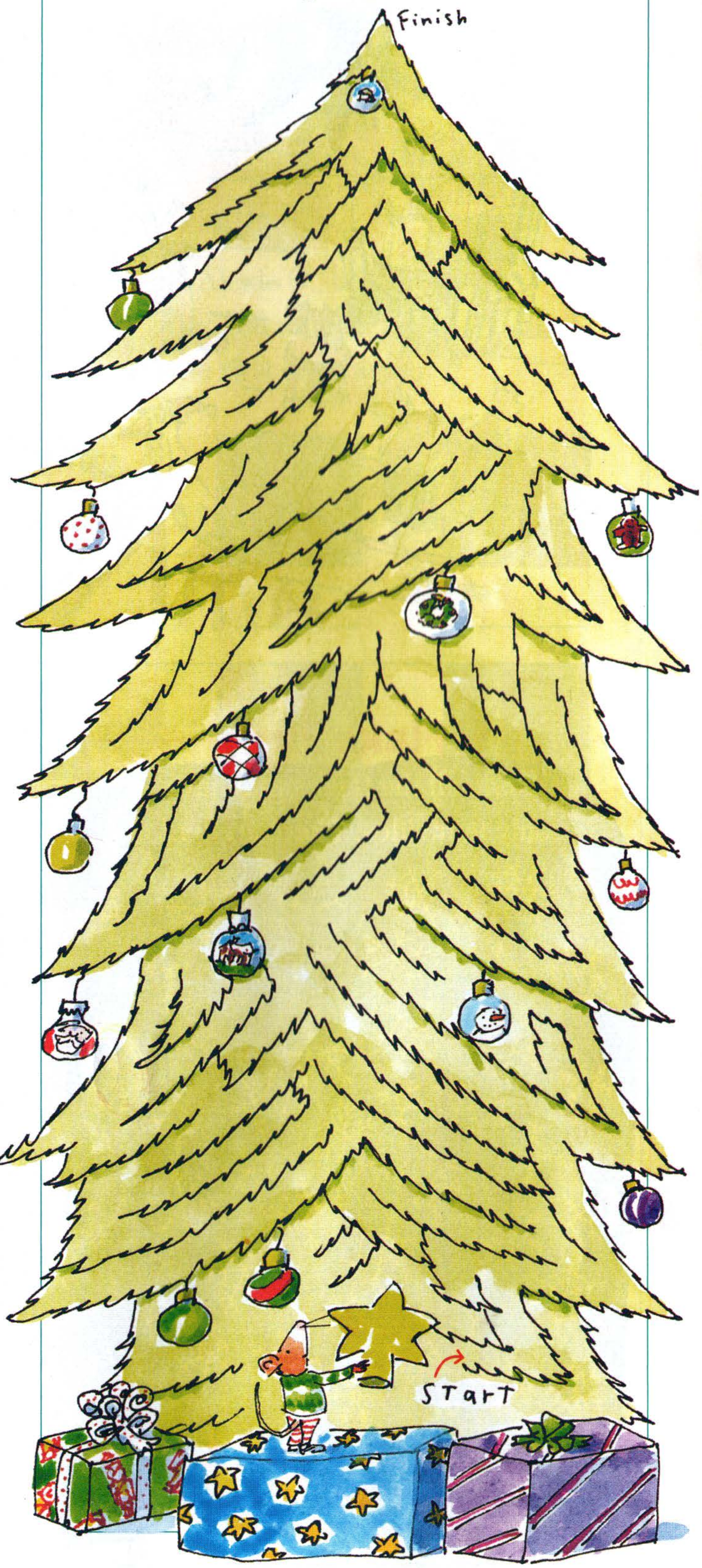
Give a Little

Noelle collected coins for charity. Figure out the total amount in dollars and cents for each kind of coin, then add up the total.



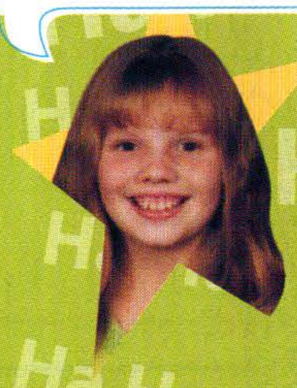
Climb a Tree

Help the mouse find her way to the top of the tree.



Laffateria

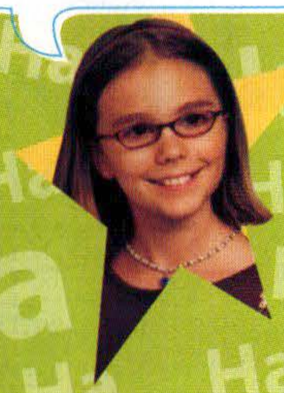
What kind of music did the pilgrims listen to?



Plymouth Rock

Hannah M.
Age 12 , Missouri

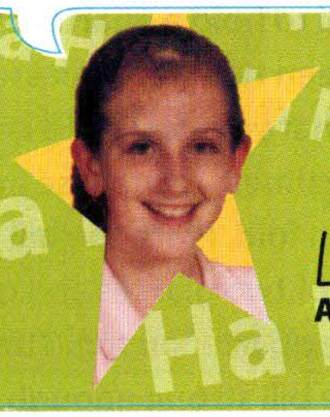
What does slime say on January first?



"Happy Goo Year!"

Kara S.
Age 12, Florida

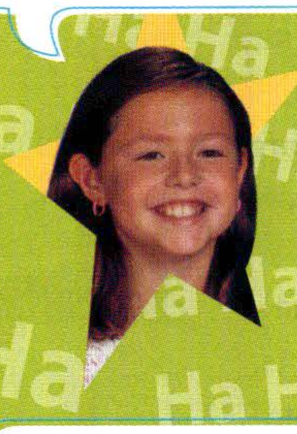
What happens when you have a holiday party and everyone wants punch?



They create a punchline.

Lauren B.
Age 13, Maryland

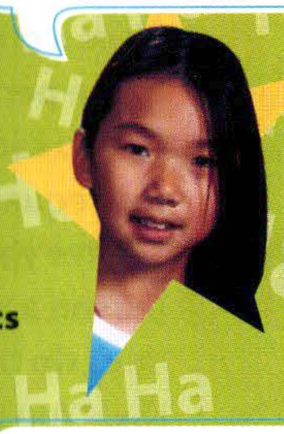
Who delivers all of the toys to kittens?



Santa Claws

Caroline K.
Age 11, Massachusetts

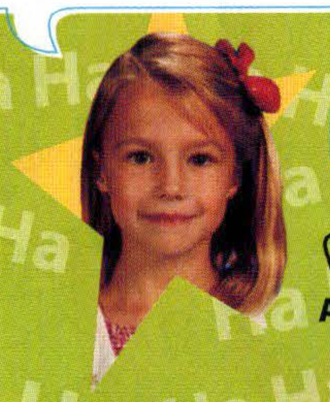
How do snowmen travel around?



By icicle!

Ashley H.
Age 11, California

What did the girl say to her mom when they were baking cookies?



"I'll be the flour girl."

Paige M.
Age 9, Colorado

What do you get when you mix a deer and a pistachio?



A doe nut

Megan M.
Age 10, Washington

What's Santa's favorite drink?



H_2 ho ho ho

Emilee S.
Age 11, New York

Funny Business

Send your best joke to Brain Waves! Write to the address on page 2. Include your name, birth date, school photo, and signature.



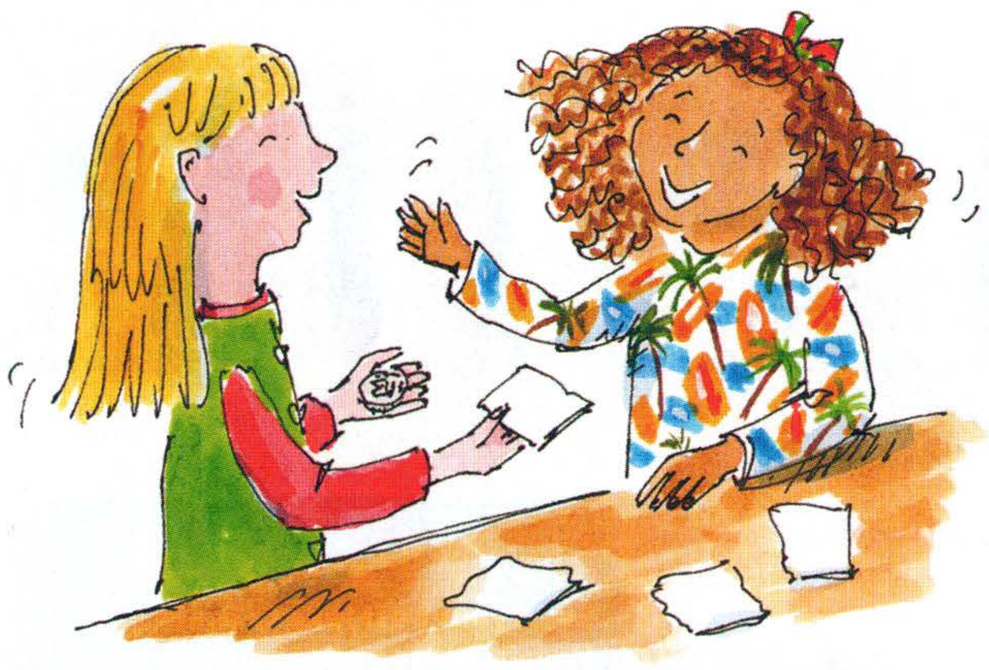
Holiday Magic

Surprise your family with these tricky coin tricks!

Buck-a-Roo

Bet someone that you can use a dollar bill to hold a quarter in the air between two water glasses. Here's what you do: Fold a crisp bill a few times lengthwise in an accordion fold. Place the bill across the tops of two glasses and gently place the quarter on top. The folds make the bill strong enough to hold the quarter.





Corny Coin

Place a quarter on the table and say to the person sitting next to you, "If you can tear a paper napkin into four equal parts with just two tears, I'll give you a quarter." Hand the person a paper napkin. When she does rip the napkin into four parts, say, "You win. Here's your quarter." Then hand her one of the four pieces of the torn paper napkin. Put your money back into your pocket!

Answer Box

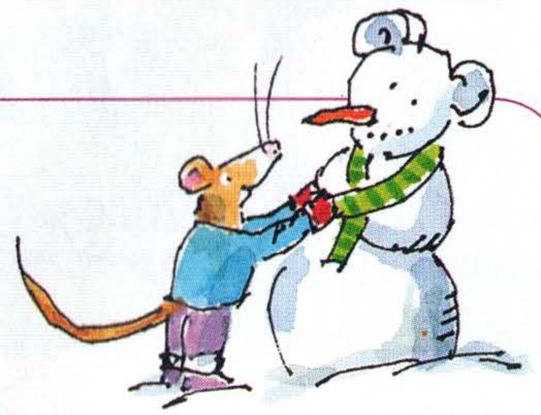


Photo Fun

A. B2; B. B4; C. D1; D. D4; E. A2; F. B3

Take a Good Look

Some of the words we found are: moose, hoof, footstool, stool, foot, moon, books, bookshelf, door, doorknob, tools, broom, cuckoo clock, boots, wood, floor, noodles, spoon, cookies, raccoon, hood, hoodie, hula hoop, goose, choo-choo, caboose, and loop.

Flake Fun



Art Sleuth

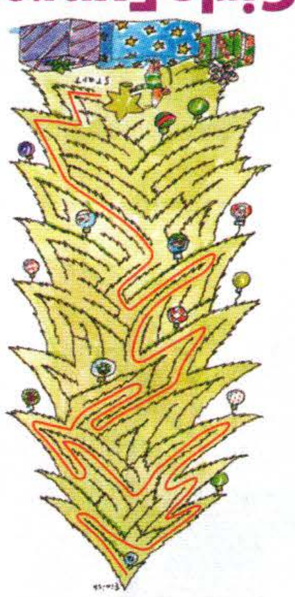
1. page 24; 2. page 16; 3. page 37

Elf Help

Following along the string from the left, the missing colors are: purple, yellow, green, blue, and red.

Girls Express

The buzzword, euphoric, is on page 29.



Climb a Tree



Give a Little

Noelle has $8.51 in pennies, $27.55 in nickels, $23.20 in dimes, and $29.25 in quarters, for a total of $88.51.

Mini Mag

With the Mini Mag, you can make a miniature copy of *American Girl* for your doll or stuffed animal. All you need are scissors and a stapler. Read the directions all the way through before you begin.

1 **Cut out each pair of pages only on the dotted lines. Be sure to cut around the tabs marked with the letters A, B, C, and D.**



2 **Stack the pages on top of one another in the order shown below, with the letters on the tabs facing up.**

Continued

B



D



A



C



Illustrations: Susan McAliley

Mini Mag

3 Fold the stack of pages in half along the solid line in the center. The cover of the magazine should now be on top. Run your fingernail down the folded edge to help the pages lie flat.



4 Open the folded stack. Staple along the center line. Cut off the tabs, and you're done!



Quiz

Holiday Fun for the Family

The holidays are almost here! Try this silly quiz with your family to find out how much you have in common.



Celebration

Would you rather . . .

- watch a holiday parade or be in one?
- spend the holidays on a tropical beach or in a mountain cabin?
- sing in a holiday pageant or go caroling?
- watch 24 hours of holiday movies or listen to 24 hours of holiday music?
- spend the holidays cooking delicacies or having them visit you?



Fun

Would you rather . . .

- keep a pet reindeer or a snowman in your room?
- ski to the store or ride in a sleigh?
- drink hot chocolate or eat a snow cone?
- wear a Santa hat or elf shoes all day?
- eat a gingerbread house or live in one?



Performing Tips

Here are a few things judges look for during a dance competition:

- Confidence—satisfying and not overemphasizing the hard moves
- Timing—really listening to the music and staying on beat
- Head—looking up, to the side, or down, depending on the dance
- Dance position—standing tall with arms right

Tango

Corina L. and Michael S. tango to a harmonic and smooth dance in which the dancers are very expressive. The partners look at each other and the music is dramatic!

When you are performing

"Focus on your partner."

Tip about bugs:

"Don't be afraid because they are not going to bite you!"

Corina L. and Michael S.

Twirling, tangoing, dipping, and dancing—for one school, that was all part of a normal day during a ten-week ballroom dance course. That meant hours of practicing and memorizing steps for the rumba, the tango, and the salsa, and it was all in preparation for a city-wide competition featuring the best dancers in the school. But it also meant something else—new friendships.

Excited to learn new dances, the girls had only one concern: "The teacher told us we had to look at the boys while we danced. I didn't want to, so I looked at the top of the boy's head," says Damaris S. "We weren't used to touching boys," adds Corina L.

The boys had another concern—they thought dancing with girls would be boring. But after giving some new moves a try, the boys were ready to face up their dancing shoes every day. "We're so into it now, it's unreal," says Michael S. The girls feel more comfortable, too. "Now it's not a big deal. It's like, 'Let's go dance!'" Corina adds.

153

Contest

Fake Frosties

These AG readers made snowmen out of everything from ice cream to pumpkins to yarn—everything *but* snow!





Behind the Scenes

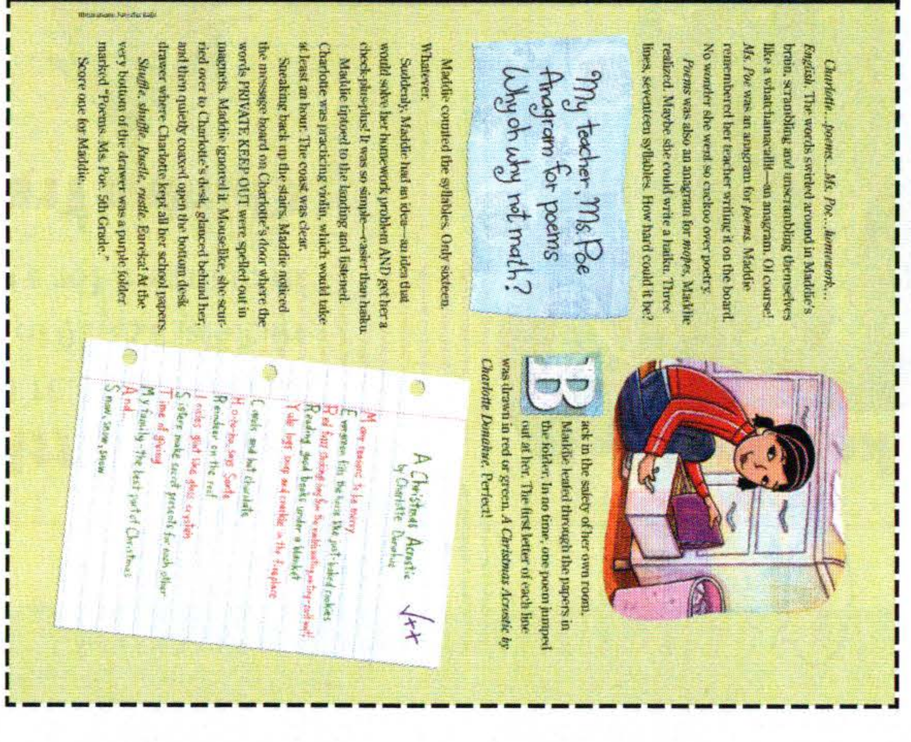
We had fun filling this issue with snow, stars, and surprises!

Craft

Memory Books

Turn paper bags into a scrapbook to hold great memories.





Charlotte...poems...Ms. Poe...homework... English. The words swirled around in Maddie's brain, scrambling and unscrambling themselves like a whatchamacallit—an anagram. Of course! *Ms. Poe* was an anagram for *poems*. Maddie remembered her teacher writing it on the board. No wonder she went so cuckoo over poetry. *Poems* was also an anagram for *mopes*, Maddie realized. Maybe she could write a haiku. Three lines, seventeen syllables. How hard could it be?

My teacher, Ms. Poe
Anagram for poems
Why oh why not math?

Maddie counted the syllables. Only sixteen. Whatever.

Suddenly, Maddie had an idea—an idea that would solve her homework problem AND get her a check-plus-plus! It was so simple—easier than haiku.

Maddie tiptoed to the landing and listened. Charlotte was practicing violin, which would take at least an hour. The coast was clear.

Sneaking back up the stairs, Maddie noticed the message board on Charlotte's door where the words PRIVATE. KEEP OUT were spelled out in magnets. Maddie ignored it. Mouse-like, she scurried over to Charlotte's desk, glanced behind her, and then quietly opened the bottom desk drawer where Charlotte kept all her school papers.

Shuffle, shuffle. Rustle, rustle. Eureka! At the very bottom of the drawer was a purple folder marked "Poems. Ms. Poe. 5th Grade."

Score one for Maddie.

Back in the safety of her own room, Maddie leafed through the papers in the folder. In no time, one poem jumped out at her. The first letter of each line was drawn in red or green. *A Christmas Acrostic by Charlotte Donihue.* Perfect!

A Christmas Acrostic
by Charlotte Donihue

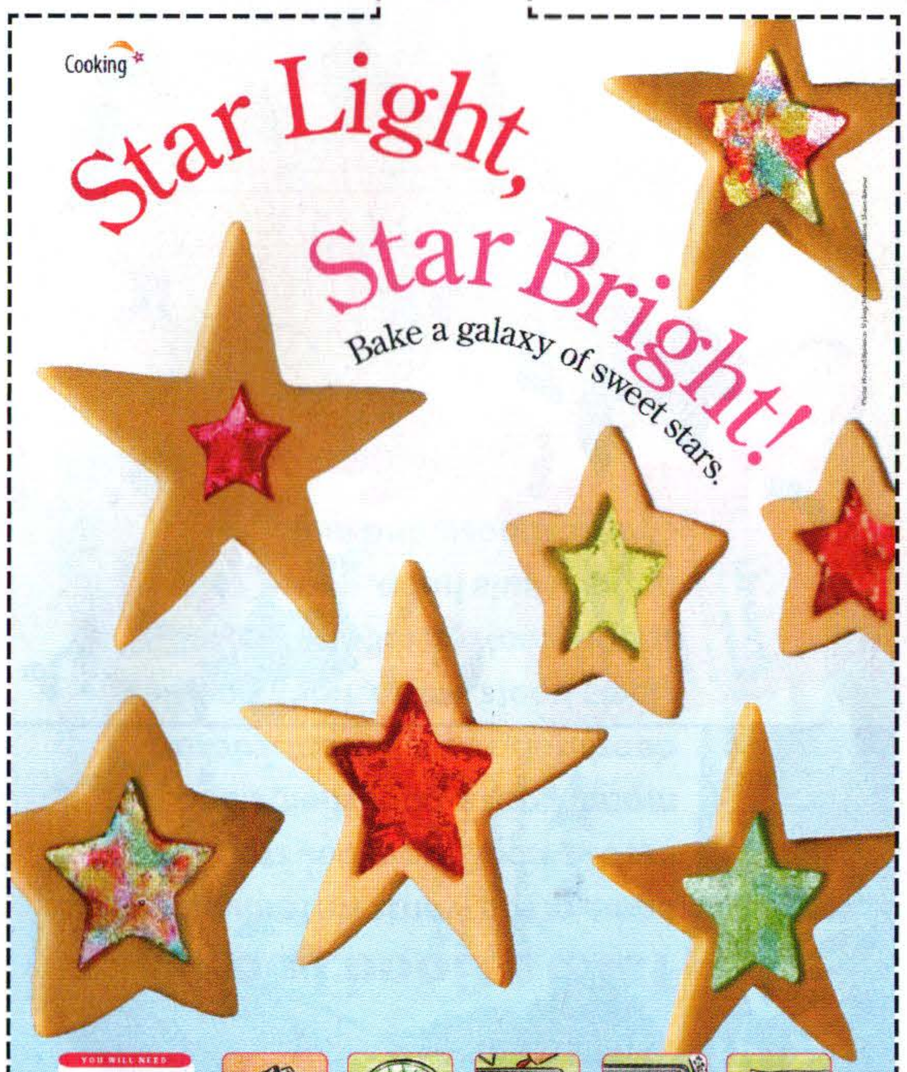
Many reasons to be merry
Eight tiny reindeer fly through the pitch-naked darkness
Red and white candy canes hang from the mantelpiece
Reading about books under a blanket
Yule logs burn and crackle in the fireplace

Cards and hot chocolate
Holly-berry, Santa
Reindeer on the roof
Jingles ghost like photo system
Sisters make secret presents for each other
Time of giving
My family—the best part of Christmas
And...
Snow, snow, snow

Cooking

Star Light, Star Bright!

Bake a galaxy of sweet stars.



YOU WILL NEED

- An adult to help you
- 1 cup colored hard candies, such as Jolly Ranchers or Life Savers
- Nonstick cooking spray
- 1 stick butter, softened
- ½ cup sugar
- ½ teaspoon vanilla
- 1 egg
- 1½ cups flour
- star cookie cutters (2 sizes)



1 Put unwrapped candies in a plastic zip-lock bag and seal. Place bag in another plastic bag and seal. Wrap in a dish towel and place on a cutting board. Ask an adult to break candy into small bits using a hammer. Set aside. Cover a baking sheet with foil. Spray with nonstick cooking spray. Set aside.

2 Ask an adult to preheat oven to 350 degrees. Wash hands. Combine butter, sugar, and vanilla in bowl with fork. In a separate bowl, beat egg with fork. Add to butter mixture and mix well. Stir in flour. Squeeze mixture with your hands to form dough. If dough feels sticky, add a little more flour.

3 Sprinkle flour on work surface and roll dough to ¼-inch thickness. Cut out cookies using larger star cookie cutter. Place cookies on baking sheet. Dip the smaller star cookie cutter in flour and cut small stars out of large star cookies. Remove small stars and set aside to reroll and reuse dough.

4 Ask an adult to bake cookies 4 minutes, and then remove baking sheet from oven. Carefully put candy pieces inside each star, making sure to fill in tips of stars. (Candy will melt and spread.) Ask an adult to bake cookies again until candy is just melted and dough is light brown, about 5 to 7 more minutes.

5 Ask an adult to remove baking sheet from oven. Let cookies stand until completely cool, about 30 minutes. (If you try to remove cookies too soon, they will crack.) Peel foil off backs of cookies. Now you can nibble the cookie crusts and savor the hard candy centers!

Bright,
sparkling,
shining,
unique—
just like
me!

Posters Carefully cut along the dotted lines to remove your posters.

Image: stockxpert

American Girl®

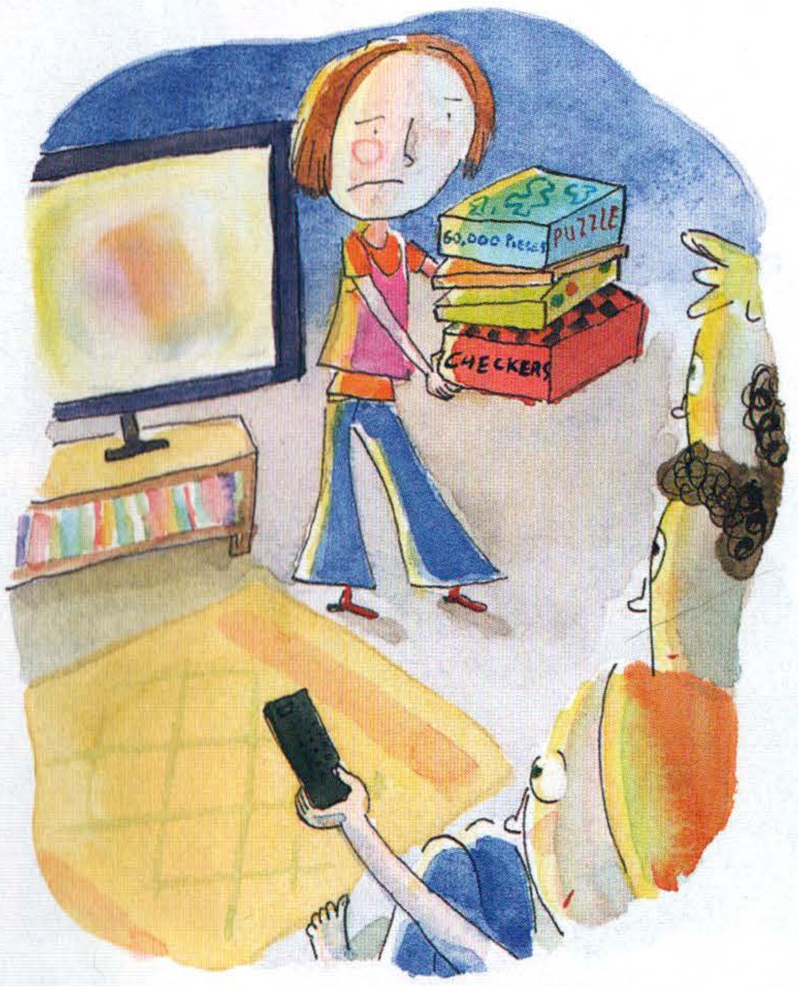
Have yourself a furry little Christmas!



Photo: GK Hart/Vikki Hart/ Getty Images

American Girl®

HELP!



Dear *American Girl*,

When my friends come over, all they want to do is watch TV. I try distracting them with games, but they never respond. What should I do?

Friendless

Watching television is tempting when you don't have any better ideas, so have something fun planned and ready to go the minute your friends walk in the door. (For some great ideas, turn to page 24.) Then hang out in a TV-free room. If you can avoid turning the TV on at all, you won't have to argue about turning it off.

★

Dear *American Girl*,

I have a really bad habit of chewing the ends of my hair. I try to stop, but I can't! My mom's starting to get really annoyed by it. Any ideas?

Hair Chewer

Wearing your hair pulled back in a ponytail or braid will help keep it out of your mouth. When you feel like chomping on something, try bubble gum or hard candy—anything that would be gross with hair stuck to it. Give yourself time and you should be able to break this habit. The first few days are usually the hardest. Good luck!

★

Dear *American Girl*,

My sister is almost 17, and every time my parents leave, she listens to music that they have told her not to listen to. Today she told me not to tell them. I don't know what to do!

Tell?

If your sister listens to this music quietly in her room or on headphones, you don't have to tell. But if she's playing the music loud enough for you to hear, it's not fair to make you listen to it. Let her know that you don't like being put in the middle and that, if asked, you won't lie to your parents for her. Ask her to turn the music down, and if she says no, talk to your parents about it. Just because your sister chooses to break the rules doesn't mean you have to be a part of it.

★

Dear *American Girl*,

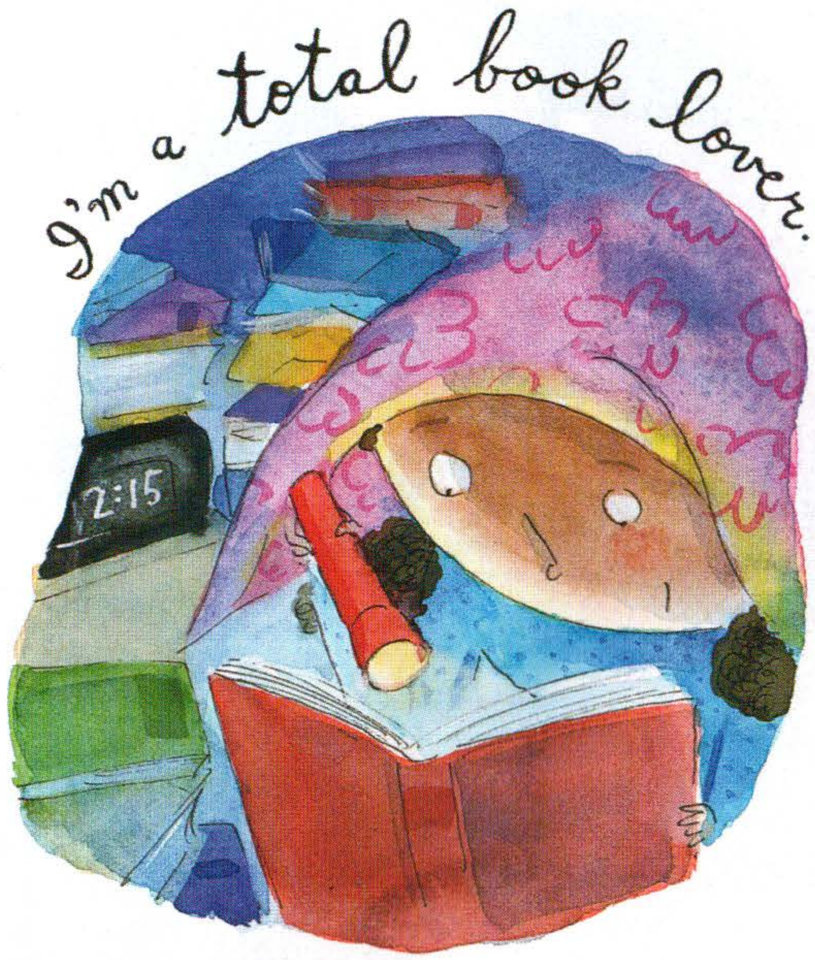
My friend gets mad if I don't say she's my tippy-top best friend. When she asks if she is, I say, "You're my best school friend." Then she says, "I don't want to be your friend if I'm not your best friend in the world!" Then she leaves.

I WANT MY FRIEND BACK!

This girl was wrong to try to force you to rank your friends. But by telling her she's *not* your best friend in the world, you've probably hurt her feelings. Next time, just say, "I like all my friends, including you. But I don't like to rank them, and I don't like feeling pressured, so please drop it." Don't get trapped into saying who's best. And if she keeps pressuring you, it's O.K. to spend less time with her.

Illustrations: Laura Cornell

MORE HELP!



Dear *American Girl*,

I'm a total book lover. I love to read so much that I can't restrain myself at night when I have a light—even on school nights. This can really tire me out. How can I cut down on the nighttime reading sessions?

under the covers

It's wonderful that you love to read, but sleep is important, too. Try going to bed earlier and reading only until your usual bedtime. If you know you're going to be really caught up in a book that you just can't put down, ask your parents to take it away until the next day. With their help, you'll get plenty of reading time—and enough sleep.

★

Dear *American Girl*,

My friend can do everything—and well! I've been on her athletic teams and she blows me away! I think I'm doing well, but then compared to her I'm just doing O.K.

Jealous?

When you compare yourself to your friend and feel like you don't measure up, you're really cutting yourself down. If she can motivate and inspire you, great. But if comparing yourself makes you feel bad, then encourage yourself instead. Don't think, *Wow, she does that so much better than I ever will.* Think, *I want to be as good at that as she is, and if I keep trying, I will be.* You'll feel better if you focus on improving what you can do, not on what your friend can already do.

★

Dear *American Girl*,

One of my friends never says "Thank you" or "You're welcome." How can I get her to say "Thanks"?

Thankless

It's funny how much those little words can mean, isn't it? But you can't force your friend to have good manners, and it's really not your job, either. If you know she appreciates the things you do, you can try to overlook this side of her. You can also set a really good example—maybe she'll get the hint. Instead of just saying "Thanks," you could say, "Wow, that was so nice!" or "I sure appreciate your help." Show your gratitude for the things she does, and she just might thank you.

★

Advice from You

"I was invited to a concert that was on a school night. I wanted to go, so I did my best in school, did my chores, and helped my mom. She noticed, and she let me go! If you help your parents out, they will give you more privileges."

Rosie R.
Age 12, Texas

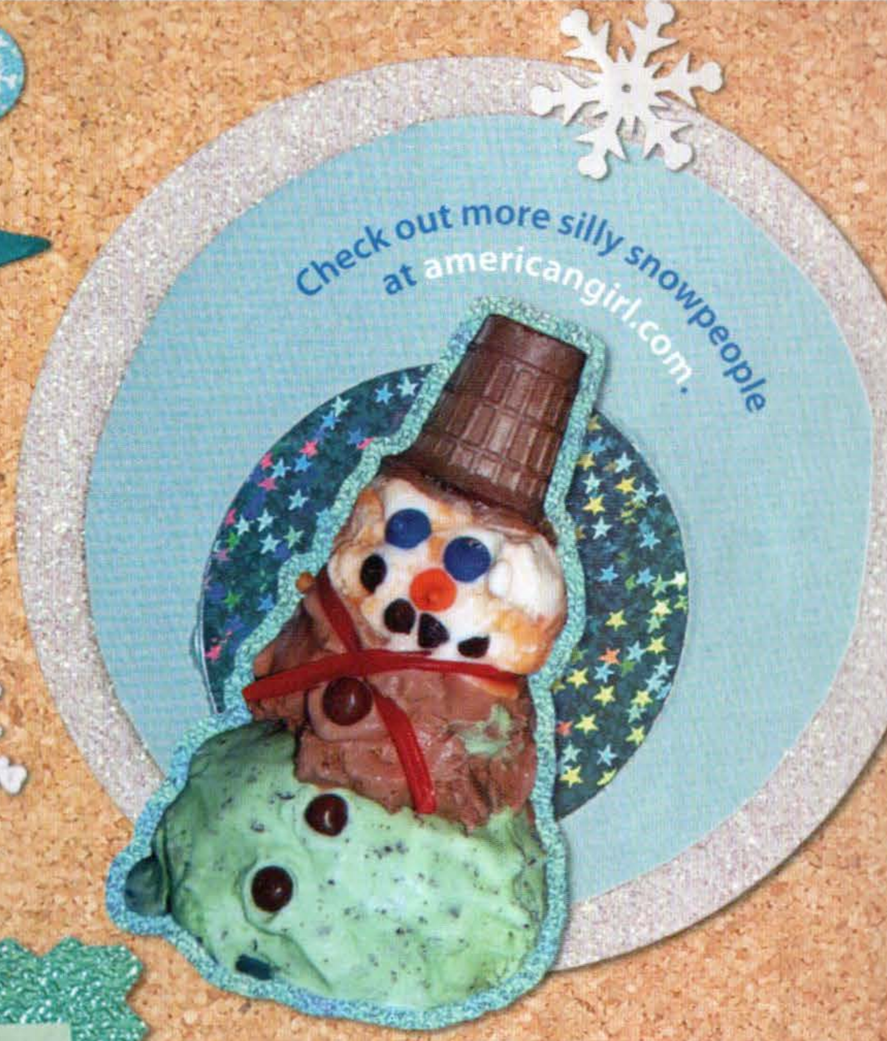
Need advice? Got advice? Write:

Help!
***American Girl* magazine**
8400 Fairway Place
Middleton, WI 53562





The photographer drilled tiny holes in these star cookies and hung them from strings. We were lucky none of the cookies fell!



Behind the Scenes

We had fun filling this issue with snow, stars, and surprises!

Go to americangirl.com by November 20 and click on "Fun for Girls" to vote for your favorite topic for "You Pick It!"

Go to "Fun for Girls" at americangirl.com to make up a poem of your own—just like in "Snow Angel." Also, read poems that author Megan McDonald wrote when she was in fourth grade.



Nancy F. owns three pet birds, named Ambergold, Cyan, and Tiger.



Colleen F. from Heart to Heart sent us a picture of her birthday tree!

Photos: Chris Hynes. Photo of Nancy: Zuirai Photo Studio

Style It!

Pretty (and easy!) hairdos you will love

Share & Care

Sweet little valentines for you to give

Go to americangirl.com and click on "Fun for Girls" for more magazine fun!

American Girl®

Coming up in the January/February issue

It's AG Magazine's 15th Birthday!

Get a whole issue full of celebrations and surprises.

It's Party Time

Great ideas for games, food, and fun, all inspired by AG magazine!

Happy, Happy, Happy!

See the winners of our birthday-card contest.

Illustrations: Carol Yoshizumi